FOR MISSION LEADERS

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BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR MISSION

Willard M. Swartley

During my recent visits to numerous cities of first-century Christianity, I often asked myself: By what power and vision did the Apostle Paul dare to preach to the famed Athenian philosophers, to confront Ephesian and Corinthian civil religion, and to challenge imperial Rome's political sovereignty? I asked myself, who was this Paul anyway who headed for the cultural, commercial, and political urban centers and dared to defy the sacred cows of the Roman empire, whose emperor himself claimed to be "the august son of the august god." Did the sending churches back home at Jerusalem and Antioch know what a powerful "guerilla-bomb" their missionary Paul really was?

Continued reflection upon these questions prompted insights into several areas of thought, all of which are crucial to the Christian's missionary task, Apostle Paul's and ours.

I. The Pattern for Growth: Jerusalem to Rome

The Book of Acts tells an unusual success story. It tells how Christianity began in Jerusalem as a localized religion with few adherents and grew into a worldwide movement claiming disciples throughout Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. The very structure of Luke's story accents the remarkable growth of this messianic movement. As Bruce Metzger suggests,[1] the Book of Acts consists of six periods of church expansion, each period concluding with a summary statement of church growth:

> Period I: 1:1-6:7. The gospel spreads throughout Jerusalem.
> Summary: "And the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (6:7).

Period II: 6:8-9:31. The church is extended throughout Palestine, including Samaria. Summary: "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied" (9:31).

Period III: 9:32-12:24. The gospel moves beyond Jewish boundaries. Cornelius becomes a believer and the church begins in Antioch. Summary: "But (despite persecution) the Word of God grew and multiplied" (12:24).

Period IV: 12:25-16:5. Cyprus and Asia Minor receive the gospel and new churches are founded. Summary: "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily" (16:5).

Period V: 16:6-19:20. Through Paul's second and third journeys the gospel is carried into Europe with churches established in Philippi, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus. Summary: "So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily" (19:20).

Period VI: 19:21-28:31 Paul's missionary labors culminate in Rome through his arrest and appeal to Caesar. Summary: "And he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered" (28:30-31).

Underlying this pattern of phenomenal church expansion is the million dollar theological issue: Who gets the kingdom of God? The "kingdom of God" is a crucial term in Acts. During the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension, Jesus, when he appeared to the disciples, was speaking concerning the kingdom of God" (1:3). Hence the disciples' question in 1:6: "Will you in this era restore the kingdom to Israel?" Tucking away the question of time into the Father's sovereign purpose, Jesus answered: "After receiving Holy Spirit power you will be my witnesses in (1) Jerusalem (1:1-8:3), (2) all Judea and Samaria (8:4-12:25), and (3) unto the ends of the earth" (13:1-28:31).

Not until the gospel's expansion reaches Samaria does the basic term, "kingdom of God" again occur. The in Samaria, Philip is preaching "the good news of the kingdom of God" (8:12). Again there is no mention of the term until Paul takes the gospel to the Gentile world (13:1ff). Then the phrase occurs three times! After his first missionary journey was blessed by Gentile believers, Paul warns "that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (14:22). In his Ephesian ministry, Paul spent three months "pleading about the kingdom of God" (19:8). And in his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders gathered at Miletus, Paul describes his missionary labors thus: ". . . I have gone about preaching the kingdom . . ." (20:25).

When the book reaches its climax, so also does the author's use of the term

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"kingdom of God." After arriving at Rome, the capital of the empire, we are told that Paul is "testifying to the kingdom of God . . ." (28:23). Four citations of Old Testament Scripture then follow, all stressing that God's sovereign purpose has been accomplished in the Gentiles' acceptance of the gospel. The concluding note says simply that Paul spent two years in Rome, "preaching the kingdom of God . . ." (28:31).

Quite clearly and precisely, the missionary vision of Acts is that "the kingdom of God" must no longer be considered Israel's private possession. It is a liberating power calling all people--Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles--into a common fellowship under Christ's Lordship. The Christian church, originating in Jerusalem, must grow until it is found throughout the empire and especially in Rome. Paul himself must contribute to the gospel's growth in the capital city. For Paul Rome symbolized the center of world power and culture. Not until he reached the capital was his mission complete, his task fulfilled.

II. The Role of the Sending Church

In reflecting upon this rapid spread of first-century Christianity, one does well to ask: What was the role of the sending church in this missionary enterprise? And which was the sending congregation--Jerusalem, Antioch, or Ephesus? Actually, each center was the sending church in certain respects.

Five considerations show how Jerusalem took initiative in the missionary enterprise. (1) On the occasion when the gospel first moved beyond Jewish geography into Samaria, Peter and John went from Jerusalem to Samaria to extend the Pentecost community of faith to the new believers (8:14-15). (2) Upon hearing of the birth of the church in Antioch, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to Antioch to affirm the Lord's salvific work and thus firmly link Antioch to Jerusalem as common centers of God's peoplehood (11:21-24). Barnabas also went to Tarsus to get Paul to assist the continuing missionary work in Antioch (11:25-26). (3) On the first Pauline missionary journey, two textual notes clearly indicate the importance of Jerusalem in the team's missionary origin. (a) Barnabas, the Jerusalem missionary in Antioch, is mentioned first in the selected pair, Barnabas and Saul (13:2). (b) John (Mark) also from Jerusalem goes with them as their hupēretēn (the Greek word in 13:5), which means an officially appointed "minister of the word" (compare Luke 1:2). John Mark's presence on the missionary team was Jerusalem's guarantee that the gospel would be faithfully transmitted and proclaimed.[2] (4) The Pauline mission among the Gentiles was accountable for its ecclesiastical authority to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15). (5) Paul's determination to take the relief gift to Jerusalem (Romans 15:16, 24-33; Acts 21:7-15) symbolized both his commitment to the unity of the church and his awareness that Gentile Christianity stands indebted to Jewish Christianity. For these convictions he was willing to live and die.

From beginning to end in the Acts account, Jerusalem played a key role in the missionary enterprise. This mutual responsibility to each other, both in financial resources and discernment of the practical meaning of the gospel for church life, should be instructive to us today.

The role of Antioch in the Pauline missionary enterprise was also fundamental. Antioch developed into the leading center for Gentile Christianity (11:20ff). The church at Antioch, equipped with prophets and teachers (13:1), also became the commissioning body for the first missionary journey. The text indicates that the Holy Spirit initiated the missionary movement (13:2). The perception

that Barnabas and Saul should be set apart for the missionary task apparently came not to the whole church but to the prophets and teachers as they were worshipping and fasting. It may well be that these leaders sensed an oversupply of prophets and teachers and discerned which ones among them were best gifted for a new task. Further, it appears that this group of leaders functioned as the representative body in commissioning this team for missionary work.

At the end of its first journey (14:26), the missionary team returned to Antioch. They called the church together to hear their report on God's work among the Gentiles (14:27).

Again, the sending church was vitally involved in the missionary enterprise, even though this sending church may have thought of itself as a new congregation formed by missionary assistance from Jerusalem. Even though the missionaries had founded new congregations, they still recognized the role of Jerusalem.

Later in Paul's ministry, Ephesus became the headquarters of his labors. For three months Paul taught in the synagogue, pleading about the kingdom of God. When opposition came, he found a new center, the hall of Tyrannus, in which he continued teaching for two years. From this ministry the gospel spread throughout all Asia (19:10). In his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders, Paul indicates that his ministry in Ephesus lasted for three years (20:31). It is also quite certain that his letters to Corinth (and possibly the Galatian epistle) were written during his stay at Ephesus.

While Ephesus is nowhere designated as the sending church for Paul's missionary team, it is clear that it became an on-the-field center for the missionary movement in Asia Minor and Europe. Seven Asia Minor churches are mentioned in Revelation 2-3 with Ephesus listed first. This suggests that Ephesus functioned as a successful originating center for the gospel's spread.

In all of these cases--Jerusalem, Antioch, and Ephesus--the role of any given Christian center was not static. The specific role of each congregation was determined by the dynamic of the missionary movement itself, but the urgent point claiming our careful attention is that every one of these congregations was involved in the missionary cause in a continuing role. So it must be for congregations today if they are Spirit-led, gift-discerning congregations.

III. The Power for Growth

The Book of Acts clearly indicates that Christianity's growth from Jerusalem to Rome came through the power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8 explicitly says: The spread of the Christian witness will happen after you receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence Pentecost heads the story of the Christian mission (Acts 2).

The missionary significance of Pentecost is threefold: the release of new power, the perception that Jesus is both Lord and Christ, and the formation of a new community which through the miracle of tongues overcame historical, linguistic boundaries. Throughout the Book of Acts we are reminded of fresh outbursts of the Spirit's power, usually by the term, "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:5; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9, 52).

In the Book of Acts this spiritual power was not a nebulous good feeling. It

was rather integral to the messianic scandal, the bold conviction that a specific man, Jesus of Nazareth, is both Jewish Messiah and universal Lord (Acts 2:36). The goal of the missionary, therefore, is to call for belief in this messianic scandal, an offense to both Jews and Greeks (I Cor. 1:22-24) and then expect the formation of a believing community.

As one stands in the ruins of ancient Corinth or sits upon the rocks of the Areopagus (Mars Hill) under the shadow of the Acropolis, one of the greatest cultural achievements, he feels overwhelmed by the boldness and courage of the Apostle Paul. Paul proclaimed not a gospel of noble ideas or social betterment but a gospel of a new political reality. Jesus is Messiah and Lord of all and hence calls all people into full allegiance to his Lordship. Jesus is Lord because God raised him from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus is, therefore, the linchpin in all missionary motivation and vision. Paul's speech to the Athenian philosophers makes this point unmistakeably clear. Not only does the text indicate that Paul was preaching "Jesus and the resurrection" (17:18), but it also records the final words of the sermon: ". . . he (God) has given assurance to all men by raising him (Jesus) from the dead" (17:31b). Verse 32 then says that some mocked when they heard about the resurrection of the dead.

This reality of the risen Christ infused by the dynamic of the Holy Spirit and the vision of a new universal peoplehood supplied the power of the missionary movement. Neither mocking nor persecution could halt it. Beyond Paul and his colleagues was the Lord himself--the Lord of his new people, the Lord over the emperor, and the Lord of the very gospel the missionaries preached.

IV. Courage to Confront and Conquer

Only by coming to terms with the unique power behind Paul's work can one begin to comprehend how Paul confronted the three major pagan bulwarks of Roman society.

A. In Athens Paul confronted the proud achievements of human intellect. Close to where Paul stood to address some Stoic and Epicurean philosophers was the famed Parthenon, a showcase of architectual excellence, the well proportioned Propylaea, the small graceful temple of Wingless Victory, and the exquisite beauty of the Erechtheum. In the midst of all these monuments to Athen's cultural grandeur stood the large statue of Athena, the goddess of beauty and perfection. Further, these philosophers could boast of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. To entertain themselves, they listened to what this new babbler, Paul, had to say.

Hats off to Paul! He took the opportunity. While recognizing the validity of some philosophical insights, Paul nonetheless stood firm both in denouncing Athenian idolatry and in affirming that history--past, present, and future--hinges upon an appointed person whom God raised from the dead.

It is customary to say that Paul's effort was a failure, implying that we should now know better than confront philosophers with the gospel. Yet the text reminds us that some believed--Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, among others. The fourth-century Christian historian, Eusebius, tells us that this Dionysius became the first bishop of the church at Athens. This indicates that Paul's effort met with greater success than is usually acknowledged. And likewise, it indicates that Paul's encounter with philosophy should urge us to speak the gospel courageously to today's esteemed philosophers, artists, and scientists. If this point is taken seriously, it will

mean that our church's educational enterprise will also be part of our church's missionary commitment.

B. In Ephesus and Corinth Paul sabotaged first-century civil religion. Early in the first century, a trend began which developed into an open clash between the Roman government and Christianity. After his death in A.D. 14, Augustus Caesar was acclaimed as son of the deity. Within several decades the emperors were regarded as gods worthy of worship throughout the empire.

In order to facilitate this new emperor cult, many temples were built in major cities from Rome to Baalbek. Both Ephesus and Corinth were among these centers selected to promote the new imperial cult. But this emperor worship did not replace the earlier cults oriented to the fertility cycles of life, both human and agricultural. The older worship of Ashtarte, Aphrodite, and Venus continued. Cultic prostitution was commonplace. There emerged in the first century a powerful combination of sex, politics, and religion, a formidable kind of successful civil religion supporting the economy of these cities.

Into the midst of this political playboy paganism came Paul with the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. So effective was his sabotage of this civil religion that a riot broke out in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41). Demetrius' protest indicates that Paul's successful Ephesian ministry, two to three years long, had actually created an economic paralysis. Fewer and fewer people were buying the pagan cultic products. In Demetrius' words: ". . . this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable company of people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may count for nothing, and she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship" (19:26b-27).

In Corinth also Christianity apparently had some effect upon the local economy, at least upon the city treasurer, Erastus. Acts 19:22 reports that Paul sent Erastus into Macedonia to visit young churches. In Romans 16:23 Erastus is mentioned as the city treasurer, presumably of Corinth, since Paul wrote Romans while at Corinth. It is most interesting that at the site of ancient Corinth there is an inscription on the pavement in front of the first-century theatre which reads: "Erastus, the treasurer of the city, personally paid for laying this pavement." It seems quite certain that the Erastus of Romans 16:23 is the same Erastus mentioned in this inscription. Since the event of Acts 19:22 is several years later, it is quite likely that this Erastus quit his job as city treasurer, which certainly involved complicity with Corinth's civil religion and took up the new task of assisting Paul in his missionary work.

From these two incidents, we can observe two models of Christian confrontation of civil religion: (1) in Corinth, by calling a given person out of the system, and (2) in Ephesus, by changing the religious allegiance of a sufficient number of persons so that economic crisis and paralysis resulted.

C. In Thessalonica and Rome Paul challenged the political supremacy of Rome. According to Acts Paul went to Rome as a prisoner to appeal his case to Caeser, but we do not know what happened to that appeal. Eusebius, quoting Tertullian, tells us, however, that both Paul and Peter were respectively beheaded and crucified under Nero.

Paul's earlier troubles in Thessalonica forecast this imminent clash between Christianity and Rome. In Thessalonica the Jews accused Christians of inciting the people against the empire, ". . . acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7; cf. Luke 23:2). To preach as Paul did--that Jesus is Lord--was a political put-down for Rome, for if Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not Lord. No man can serve two masters.

Within the next several decades many Christians were killed because they refused loyalty to Caesar. Christianity became a subversive irritant to Rome's political arrogance. Polycarp's martyrdom, dating from 155 A.D., clearly indicates that the issue was political, whether Jesus was Lord or whether Caesar was Lord. This missionary movement from Paul to Polycarp shows that the gospel threatens any nation that demands unconditional allegiance from its subjects or citizens.

Conclusions

1. The pattern for missionary work and church growth is to begin at home and push outward and onward until all people have opportunity to become members of the kingdom of God.

2. There must be sending congregations who identify gifts and missionary candidates and who maintain relationships with missionaries sent out. This supporting role in the missionary enterprise must be adapted to the changing needs of the missionary movement.

3. The power for church growth comes from the Holy Spirit who enables faithful missionary witness. The gospel centers on the risen Lord and inspires the vision of a believing community composed of persons from all nations and walks of life.

4. The New Testament missionary gospel will challenge and dethrone idolatrous claims upon human lives, whether these claims come from intellectual philosophy, appealing civil religion, or arrogant political powers.

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[1]The New Testament, Its Background, Growth, and Content (Abingdon, 1965), p. 172.

[2]John Mark's return to Jerusalem (13:13) and Paul's later chagrin (15:39) is quite understandable when one regards John Mark as Peter's control on Paul. In this writer's judgment John Mark functioned as a vital bridge between Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity and hence appropriately wrote the first Gospel to assist the Gentile missionary program.

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Editorial Comment

Protestants have been schizophrenic about the relationship between church and world. Various stances have been assumed. Whatever the formal pronouncements, the outcome has generally been to challenge as little as possible the existing social order. The problem has inevitably become more complex with missionaries crossing international boundaries. White western cultural superiority came hand-in-glove with political supremacy. Civil religion has been a staple export during the past two hundred years.

The fact that the international political scene has changed radically since 1945 does not mean the church's split personality has been healed. Colonialism as a political system has ended. Colonialism as a state of mind survives. The American missionary in Vietnam who daily implored the blessing of the Almighty on the American military machine was no hypocrite. His action was consistent with a long tradition. But the dilemma remains. Indeed, it is only intensified in an age when political realities affirm the principle of self-determination for all peoples. To assert the Lordship of Jesus Christ among peoples who are exhilarated by their newly-won political independence is as difficult as in the heyday of colonialism or in the face of emperor worship.

Swartley suggests there is an answer to this problem without fully developing its outline. The nature and form of the community which the Holy Spirit wants to create through the Christian missionary movement worldwide will be a genuine counter-community. To understand this, we need biblical and historical perspective.

A Council of (Mennonite) Mission Board Secretaries statement on "Christian Conduct in Situations of Conflict" provides both theological and practical guidance to persons facing such situations. Copies are available by writing to MISSION-FOCUS. (The statement has also been printed in the Evangelical Missions Quarterly, July 1975, pp. 174-183.)

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PLANNING FOR GROWTH

Richard Showalter

In our time Christianity can truly make a practical claim to being the universal religion. Buddhism and Islam have been missionary and universal in their outlook from the beginning, but only Christianity "has now found a home in almost every country of the world; it has adherents among all the races of men, from the most sophisticated of westerners to the aborigines of the inhospitable deserts of Australia; and there is no religion of the world which has not yielded a certain number of converts to it. This is something that has never happened before in the history of the world."[1]

Furthermore, much of this expansion has taken place in our own lifetime. To me, a product of the college and university atmosphere of the 1960s, this seems almost miraculous! During the '60s we were confronted on every side by evidences of the decay of the church. I had been reared by missionary parents, and I carried the vision of following in their train. But the overwhelming impression that I gained during my college and university years was one of profound pessimism about the contemporary church. The age of missions is over, we were told. (Sometimes what was meant by that was simply that the age of colonialism is over, but the message was not always clear.)

What we did not know was that while western colonialism was collapsing, the churches which had been planted in Africa and Asia were growing vigorously. We did not realize that even while western Christian students battled with secularism, independent churches were springing up in Africa. Today there are more than 6,000 such groups in Africa. Many of them are confined to a single ethnic group, but others are quite large and spread into more than one country. One of these groups with which Mennonites have had some contact is the Kimbanguist Church of Zaire which is a good deal larger than the world Mennonite brotherhood and impresses us with its Christian pacifism.

In short, we did not carry a vision of world Christianity. I speak for myself first of all, but I think that I also speak for a great majority of my generation. We were so caught up in the throes of western civilization that we did

not catch the vision of a world fellowship of Christians, a reality given by the Holy Spirit in the very midst of the eclipse of the West.

African church growth has perhaps been most impressive. At the turn of the century there were approximately 10 million Christians in Africa. Today there are 130 million. Barrett's projection for the year 2000 A.D. is that Christians will comprise 46% of Africa's population, about triple the present number.[2] Whether or not the projection is correct, the numerical expansion of the church in Africa in our own day is enough to cheer the heart of any believer.

The case of Latin America is somewhat more complex. The rapidly-expanding Latin Protestant church is growing largely at the expense of the Roman Catholics and so does not represent direct conversion from totally non-Christian society. The figures are impressive, nevertheless. At the turn of the century there were approximately 50,000 Protestants in Latin America. Today the number of Protestants has passed 20 million, with predictions of up to 100 million for 2000 A.D. Protestantism is growing numerically at a rate three times that of the population in general.

Statistically, Asia seems to be least encouraging, with more than 2 billion people who will not even hear the gospel unless the word is carried by cross-cultural messengers. Yet even in Asia there have been movements of expansion which thrill Christians around the world. Indonesia now has something over 6 million Christians, and about 15% of the population of South Korea have confessed Christ. There is much in India and China to give reason for optimism, though both contain millions of persons who have not bowed their knees to Christ. The Spirit must be yearning with a tremendous love over the lands which produced such saints as Sadhu Sundar Singh and Watchman Nee.

These figures are indicative of the growth of the churches in parts of the world other than Europe and North America. The number of missionaries sent by North America has also grown significantly, from 10,700 in 1945 to 35,070 in 1972.

But more significant than this is the growing number of missionaries now being sent by churches in such countries as Nigeria, India, Brazil, and the Philippines. In our day the idea of foreign missions is slowly but surely being separated from the notion of colonial exploitation; for this we can only praise God.

Missions in Anabaptist/Mennonite History. Modern American Mennonites consider their tradition to be essentially missionary. The Great Commission appears over and over in the confessions of faith and court testimonies of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists. Littell shows how the idea of the restitution of the early church led to a recovery of a missionary vision which propelled missioners all over Europe. It was assumed that the Great Commission was binding upon all church members.[3]

The Anabaptist rejection of ties between church and state and the institution of believer's baptism were two theological corollaries of the mission they embraced. The view of the church as a voluntary community (against the state church concept) and the understanding of Christian commitment as "free and

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uncompelled decision" were the underlying presuppositions of a theology of the church which demanded obedience to the Great Commission as a fundamental aspect of Christian faithfulness.[4] In all these respects, the Anabaptists were distinguished from the Protestant reformers of their century. It remained for such Protestant groups as the Moravians, the Quakers, the Wesleyans, and the German Pietists to promote the free church concepts which led to the awakening of the Protestant conscience for obedience to the Great Commission.

It may also be pointed out that Anabaptist missionizing was both structured and unstructured. The Moravian Hutterite colonies were "perhaps the greatest missionary center of the sixteenth century," with deliberate strategy for planting congregations all over Europe.[5] In contrast, much of the early movement had been marked by spread through persecution, exile, merchant mobility, and more or less haphazard wandering by lay preachers. Yet it would be wrong to assume that the itineracy of such men as Blaurock and Denk was unplanned and dictated entirely by the circumstances of persecution. In fact, the famous "Martyr Synod" held at Augsburg, August 20, 1527, was a strategy-forming meeting which led to dividing out the sections of Europe on a great map of evangelistic enterprise. All this took place in the face of opposition so intense that only two or three members of the Martyr Synod lived longer than five years after the meeting.

We can analyze the degrees of cross-cultural transmission of the gospel with the following scheme:

E_0 - taking the gospel to nominal Christians in our own culture

E_1 - taking the gospel to neighbors in our own culture

E_2 - taking the gospel cross-culturally, but within the same "family" of cultures

E_3 - taking the gospel cross-culturally to a radically different culture than our own

It is striking that when we think of the Anabaptists in light of this scheme, their evangelism was almost all E_0 or E_1. They were taking the gospel to neighbors who shared their language and culture. They were part of a "people movement" to Christ. We can only guess at whether they would have sent foreign missionaries if the persecution had not been so intense.

After the Thirty Years War the descendants of the Anabaptists "disappeared." Hounded by the state authorities on account of refusal to give military service, they lived in withdrawn communities in Switzerland, South Germany, Moravia and the Netherlands. Some moved eastward to Poland and Russia; others moved westward to colonial America. The missionary vision which had been such an explosive force in the congregations of the sixteenth century was largely snuffed out. The Constantinianism which they had rejected so steadfastly was reproduced on a smaller scale within their own communities, communities which became even more decisively separated from the dominant culture when they moved to Russia and America and continued speaking German for many generations. In short, they became a "tribe," distinguished from the populace by language, endogamous marriage and dress, as well as by a faith radical in implication but which was in some respects "sleeping" in the womb of a subculture.

Mennonite church growth was now almost entirely biological. Parents gave birth

to large families. Many children remained in the Mennonite Church, faithful to the teaching they received. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, revival movements in the wider culture appealed to many Mennonite youth, and significant numbers joined other Protestant groups.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century came the series of events which have been termed the "Mennonite Great Awakening."[6] Increasing use of the English language opened the churches to greater contact with other Christian groups in America. Innovations such as the Sunday school and the protracted meeting were debated, then gradually accepted. A General Conference was formed in 1897, mission agencies were formed and church schools were instituted.

With the establishment of mission agencies, North American Mennonites moved from a position of biological reproduction to an attempt to transplant the "tribe" in other places--American cities, then India, South America, and Africa. Of course, our first missions were not consciously considered to be "transplanting the tribe," but in many respects this would be the most accurate designation for what we went about doing. We intended to plant churches which would share in full our theological tradition--itself a western tradition. We intended to plant churches which would have some success in transmitting the specific forms and symbols which had become meaningful to us in our North American subculture. For example, in 1929 a committee from the Virginia Conference presented criticisms to the Mennonite Board of Missions which (among other things) asked for conforming the dress of the Indian missionaries to that of the home church (particularly in avoiding neckties) and outlawing the wearing of the moustache by Indian Christians.[7] The manual of the Mission Board contained such proscriptions until the 1940s.

A wealth of documentation could be provided for this phase of missionary understanding, a phase which is not entirely past. Perhaps it is never completely past for any people. The missionaries themselves, of course, were among the first to realize that such "transplantation" would not be possible, but they were often hard put to explain that impossibility to people back home.

A third phase of missionary understanding might be described as the commitment to plant congregations without regard for tribal transplantation, recognizing the western "at-homeness" of both our theological tradition and our forms and symbols. This happened first among Mennonite missionaries in India where they came under the influence of J. W. Pickett and others who were becoming aware of "people movements" as a powerful vehicle for evangelization. It happened in East Africa in the 1940s when the Mennonite missionaries were involved with the East African Revival movement, and experienced the growth of the church on a new basis. It is happening now in Ethiopia. Of course the same awareness has entered the hearts and minds of Mennonite Christians in many other settings as well. Yet many of us are living too largely in phase one or two, only paying lip service to phase three.

Now look again at the E-scheme on the degrees of cross-cultural transmission of the gospel. It is striking that Mennonite missionizing in the twentieth century has been predominantly E_2 or E_3. North American Mennonites as a whole have never experienced on home soil the excitement of being part of a people movement, though we have engaged in quite a bit of cross-cultural missionary work--some of it quite "successful." Perhaps it is this which separates us most decisively from the history we claim, that of sixteenth-century Anabaptism and that of the early church. It may be that those who lived through the Mennonite Great Awakening

or those who are involved today in the charismatic renewal have come closest to the experience of such a movement. But all this has taken place primarily within a Christian community.

What would be the difference between a mission agency which is born and lives in a growing movement and a mission agency which is born and lives in a brotherhood which reproduces mainly by the conversion of its own children?

North American Mennonite Church Growth. As noted above, Mennonite foreign missions have been fairly successful in the twentieth century. Churches have been planted in nearly 40 countries outside North America and Europe, and many of these are now autonomous.

In North America, however, we cannot so easily point to a good record. We have never actually participated in the formation of rapidly growing churches on home soil except through biological growth. What explanations can be offered for this difference?

It may well be that the sociological answer is far more significant than we have recognized. There is an important sense in which nearly all Mennonite witness has been cross-cultural witness since we left Europe. Our ethnic heritage has remained strongly intact through many generations on American soil, even to the persistence in many localities of the use of a second language well into the twentieth century. Thus our "neighbors" have generally lived in a different world than we. However, we have often assumed that they are genuinely our neighbors in the sense of sharing a common culture, and so have not recognized that the same principles which have been used by our foreign missionaries in sharing the gospel must also be used at home. This is the sociological reason why it is "easy" for some Baptists to grow churches in America, while it is "hard" for Mennonites to do the same.

Personhood and Peoplehood in Church Growth. One of the most fruitful insights about the numerical growth of the church to have emerged with new power in recent years is that Christianity is passed from person to person along lines of friendship and kinship and within homogeneous social units. At first thought there may seem to be nothing new in such a statement. But when unpacked it's dynamite.

Our usual question in considering the communication of the gospel is, "How do people become Christians?" This kind of question carries a highly individualistic focus; it's the question a psychologist asks, and rightly so. However, there is another question with a sociological orientation which is equally valid, but too often ignored: "How do peoples become Christian?"

The fact is that people do not become Christians in isolation from their social context. I am a believer today because my father and mother were earnest Christians. To put it another way, my people were nearly all believers.

It is easy enough for us to accept this for ourselves, but what does it mean for the person whose social context is unchristian or anti-christian? We have often gone to such persons with a message of "Come out from among them and be you separate!" "Leave your father and mother!" "Give up your old friendships!" "Come join us!"

There is enough truth in this to make it plausible. It is true that Jesus calls us out of our old life into a new relationship with Him. It is true that He

calls us to give up everything for His sake. It is true that in Him there is a new community, created by His grace.

Nevertheless, it is also true that our culture, like our personhood, is a beautiful gift from God and is not to be lightly cast aside. Jesus never called a single person to reject his human peoplehood. Sometimes a Christian will be rejected by his people, but the reconciliation is always half-complete, for he has already forgiven those who have thus rejected him. Far from calling us to strip ourselves of our culture and peoplehood, Jesus calls us to a divine fulfillment of that very peoplehood, a salvation <u>within</u> the culture into which we were born.

In the realm of psychology this has been obvious to Christians. When Jesus asks us to "deny ourselves," we know that this does not mean the obliteration of personhood but rather the fulfillment of personhood in relation to our Creator. The same is true in the sociology of Christian experience. When Jesus asks us to "hate our father and mother," He is not calling us to the obliteration of our peoplehood but rather to the fulfillment of that peoplehood in relation to our Lord.

To some, these insights seem to be a denial of the universalism of the Christian message. However, the recognition of these sociological principles is really an argument <u>for</u> universalism. When the choice for or against Christ is made primarily on the basis of reasons for/and against particular cultural options, it is not a real decision for or against Christ. When Jesus is introduced to people <u>within</u> their culture, they can respond to Him for Who He is rather than getting mixed up in questions of whether or not in receiving Him they are denying their own peoplehood.

More important, it means that we renounce the posture of inviting people to come out from among their kinship and friendship structures in order to become Christians. We do not seek individual converts which are immediately isolated from the cultural setting in which they are at home. Rather, we interact with each person as a representative of a social group, with a view to the salvation of the whole. (Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman was not merely a one-to-one matter, for her husband was brought into the conversation soon after it started. The meeting ultimately led to the salvation of many people in her village. Jesus interacted with the woman as a representative of her <u>people</u>.)

Because we believe that culture, like personhood, is a divine gift, and because we do not believe that it is harder for God to speak Hindi or Swahili than Greek or English, we expect the Holy Spirit to speak to each person in the cultural language he knows best. We hope in every situation to see the emergence of a fellowship which is entirely at home in a given culture or subculture. Such fellowships become unlikely if we insist that our unity in Christ demands that we universalize every local congregation as far as possible as soon as possible. Our unity and our universality do not depend on attempts to include a wide cultural spectrum in every gathering. The more different is my cultural context from that of my brother and sister, the more difficult it will be for us to share in a way that builds a common life, but we are nonetheless brothers and sisters in Christ, and our ultimate treasure is complete oneness in Him.

So, although our Lord transcends culture, we never do.

The individualistic, one-by-one approach to conversion may be called "Christianization by extraction," and it stands in contrast to the approach which

anticipates conversion with a minimum of social dislocation. The enormous growth of new religious movements in our day, documented by such scholars as Gottfried Oosterwal, is one signal of the continuing relevance of understanding and applying the peoplehood principle in missions.

Oosterwal writes, "These people movements toward the Christian church are not merely a story out of the past. They continue to happen in Indonesia and Cambodia, in Thailand and India, in Africa and South America. Often unrecognized by mission leaders for what they are, the movements sometimes fizzle, or they develop into new religions or prophet-movements. Western missions with their individual-oriented approach, their institutionalism and their lack of messianic expectations may be unable to absorb such people movements when they arise. This has been one of the real tragedies in missions in the last few decades."[8]

Proposals for Planning. In light of all these factors, what should be our priorities for missions and evangelism at home and abroad? Does the "great new fact" of Christian churches established on every continent mean that our responsibility should shift from church planting to church "brothering"? Should we shift our focus from foreign missions to home missions in light of the fact that we seem to have been more successful abroad than at home in the twentieth century?

Let's take them one at a time.

I. In North America, we need a new recognition of (1) the pluralism of our society and (2) our own cultural particularity. North America is not nearly so much a "melting pot" as has often been imagined, and we need to learn to apply the principles of cross-cultural missions in many places at home as well as abroad. Furthermore, we need to provide members of culturally conservative congregations some basic training in cross-cultural witness because nearly all their witness will need to be cross-cultural to some degree. Otherwise they are subjected to the temptation of developing a guilt complex because they are not successful at adding "outsiders" to their congregations. They should not even expect to do so, any more than missionaries should expect to be able to "transplant the tribe" abroad.

What they should expect is simply that they can be used of the Lord to introduce persons to Christ and plant new churches among other "tribes" and "peoples" in North America. For members of Mennonite congregations who are culturally more liberal (i.e., closer to total assimilation to some American norm), we can focus more strongly on the possibility of E_0 or E_1 evangelism, encouraging them to expand their congregations with additions from the larger community as well as planting daughter congregations. Even with such congregations, however, we need to give more recognition to the cultural dynamics, developing greater sensitivity to the common problem of making new Christians feel like "outsiders" even as we invite them in.

II. In foreign missions, we need a new focus on the 85% of non-Christians who will never be introduced to Christ except by cross-cultural witnesses. For the past two decades we have been working at our relationships with the churches which have been planted in nearly 40 countries as a result of our missions. This has been necessary, and it will continue to be necessary. It is right that we pay attention to "brothering" such churches. It may be even more important that we pay attention to "brothering" some of the independent churches which we did not plant.

However, in light of the 85%, the Great Commission is just as binding on us in the next 25 years as it ever was for our ancestors--either in partnership with national churches where such exist or in pioneer evangelism in groups which are

wholly without a Christian witness. If it is true that the existence of younger churches is a "great new fact" of our times, it is also true that the need for cross-cultural missionaries is one of the great facts in the church of our generation. If we can, in light of this reality, deny our responsibility for cross-cultural evangelism, we are no children of our Anabaptist fathers.

An important qualification, though, must be made at just this point. Any assumption that North America carries the sole responsibility or even the chief responsibility for sending missionaries, for directing the progress of world evangelization or for creating missionary strategy and theory would be a denial of our heritage just as certainly as it would be wrong to disavow any continuing interest in church planting. We may do neither. Internationally as locally, the posture to which Christ calls us is that of brothers among brothers.

Furthermore, any time we speak of strategy in missions, we do well to remember such scenes from church history as that of Watchman Nee and his band, poised in 1948 to claim all of China for Christ. Theirs was a noble vision, and probably few have been better prepared for such a task. Yet a curtain fell in January 1949, with the coming of Mao Tse-tung to Peking that thwarted the mission in its beginning, and Watchman Nee spent most of his remaining years in prison. Who knows but what a similar judgment may stand over any dreams we dream today; indeed, over all the North American dreams of worldwide missionary strategy? So we will continue to plan, but may it be with humility born of dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

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[1]Stephen Neill, A History of Christian Missions, Penguin Books, 1964, 14f.

[2]David B. Barrett, "A.D. 2000: 350 million Christians in Africa," International Review of Mission, 59(233) January 1970, 39-54.

[3]Franklin H. Littell, The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism, Macmillan & Co., 1964, Chapter IV.

[4]John H. Yoder, "The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision," Concern, No. 18, 1971, 15f.

[5]Littell, idem, 120.

[6]J. C. Wenger, The Mennonite Church in America, Herald Press, 1966, 14.

[7]John A. Lapp, The Mennonite Church in India, Herald Press, 1972, 59-63.

[8]"New Religious Movements: a challenge to mission," Mission-Focus, 3(5), May 1975, 4.

Richard Showalter served for several years on the faculty of Eastern Mennonite College. Currently, he is engaged in further study in the School of World Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary and program director of the Mennonite Board of Missions Voluntary Service Unit at Downey, California. This article was rewritten from a presentation made at the World Mission Institute, Eastern Mennonite College in June 1975.

Editorial Comment

Mission-Focus began publication in September 1972. The aim was to offer treatments of important current missiological concerns at a serious level without the usual scholarly apparatus. An effort has been made to enlist writers who could deal with issues from various viewpoints: biblical, theological, historical, contemporary. M-F was designed to serve mission leaders in congregations, church institution staffs, voluntary service and missionary personnel. Although it was initiated on behalf of the Mennonite Church constituency, the readership has grown to include a substantial number of other persons as well. Approximately 1,380 names are on the circulation list at present.

A reader's survey was included with the September 1975 issue in order to evaluate whether M-F was meeting its objectives. Readers have made a lively response. They report that they like:

* the breadth of issues being treated
* the serious level at which articles are written
* the balance between theory and practice
* the biblical-theological emphasis
* believers' church perspective

Readers suggest:

* no basic change in format or emphasis
* some reference to corollary literature
* a survey of current missiological literature

There has been no "favorite" article. What may have particular appeal to one person is of less interest to another. Some articles have been used as study material in congregations, consultations or college and seminary classes. A few readers suggested the articles have been a bit long on "theory" and should be supplemented by more practical examples of how concepts have been put into action. Others have encouraged treatment of biblical and theological foundations for Christian witness as a direct antidote to a North American cultural tendency to emphasize the pragmatic at the expense of the "why."

The editorial committee appreciates the way readers have responded. The enthusiasm for M-F is encouraging; the suggestions are constructive. Thank you for your cooperation and help.

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FOR MISSION LEADERS

MISSION-FOCUS

Volume 4, Number 3 January 1976

NOTES ON THE THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF CHINA

J. Lawrence Burkholder

Some of us who have visited China recently have returned in general agreement regarding China's astonishing achievements. Here are some of the more astonishing.

1. A productive, noninflationary economy, almost self-sufficient, relying mainly on domestic raw materials of coal and oil, supplying food, fiber and full employment for 800 million people, impressive technological developments in agriculture and heavy industry.
2. Socialized medicine according to preventive principles resulting in excellent health, virtual elimination of venereal disease and illicit drugs.
3. Universal education on primary level, dramatic improvement in literacy, political awareness and social involvement, growth in technological education.
4. Revolutionary consciousness of the masses providing personal sense of identity.
5. A general social ethos of peace and tranquility, the miracle of social organization of 800 million people with minor evidences of strife.
6. A strong sense of national destiny in which historical realism is combined with utopian hope.
7. Unparalleled personal and national morality as evidenced by assumed honesty, low crime rate, sexual probity. Prostitution has been eliminated.
8. A strenuous work ethic with emphasis upon manual labor, simple, unostentatious living and sharing.
9. An egalitarian social system which precludes private wealth and abject poverty.
10. An ethic of selfless service to society within which personal pride, aggrandizement and "elitism" are discouraged.
11. An authoritarian social system resulting in unparalled "law and order."
12. An alternative model for underdeveloped nations with political, social and metaphysical implications--a world view.

One could go on and on. It is the total impact of China which so compellingly requires study and assessment on many levels. Students of history and political science have been studying modern China for years. Many writings have been

ideological. Religious perspectives have varied. Some reflect a typical "cold war" anti-communist sentiment. Others reflect an uncritical, naive idealism. Few, to my knowledge, have reflected the complexity and ambiguity of China. For, on the one hand, China today represents one of the greatest social, political and moral achievements in history (800 million people lifted from poverty to relative security, peace, morality and tranquility in 30 years). On the other hand, China represents the tightest social system in the world, a totalitarian dictatorship of the people which many of us in the democratic tradition regard as devoid of essential freedom.

I may be among those who are at once most impressed and most perplexed by China. To me China is known best in terms of irony. I am especially conscious of the irony of a "godless" nation with the highest morality in the world, a secular people less estranged than Christian nations, an anti-missions nation that is offering on a national scale the social benefits (schools, hospitals, relief, etc.) which missions offered on a local scale, a socialist system (virtually no private property) in which ordinary people feel that they "possess" the land, a totalitarian system in which most of the people feel liberated, a dictatorship of the people which operates on a "consensus basis," a humane, nonviolent system of personality transformation, criticism, reeducation and discipline.

Even if China's achievements were not as great as they seem and even if the irony were to that extent softened, China presents itself to Christians as a problem that cannot be ignored. It is to us above all a theological problem because so many things that Christians stand for in the name of Christ, the Chinese do in the name of Mao. Since the analogies between China and the Christian ideal are so close, the question inevitably arises as to whether China is in some sense a unique fulfillment of God's purposes. To me the analogies are exciting and incredible. The analogies between Chinese Marxism and Christianity are both formal and substantial. Let us examine a few of these:

1. The analogy of the interpretations of history. Both see history as a struggle. For communism it's a struggle between classes; for Christianity it's a struggle between good and evil. Both systems posit a "political" order at the "end" of history which may be characterized by justice, peace and happiness. Christianity looks to the coming of the Kingdom of God; Marxism looks to the coming of the pure communist state. In the meantime, of course, both systems must come to terms with frustrations, though at the present time the Chinese seem more confident of fulfillment than do many Christians.

2. The analogy of radicality. Both systems are radical and revolutionary in the sense that they call for nothing less than a "new man" and a new social order operating on principles of neighbor love and selflessness.

3. The analogy of commitment. Both systems demand total commitment. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God," can be compared with many equally radical demands for seeking first the "Revolution." In this connection, both early Christianity and Chinese Marxism are ideologically suspicious of "compromise" (Troeltsch) and "revisionism" (Mao-Tse-Tung).

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4. The analogy of life style. Both espouse the simple life. Riches are repudiated; eroticism is rejected; pride is criticized. Abandonment of ostentation in the form of fancy restaurants, silk apparel, large estates remind one of New Testament severity.

5. The analogy of discipline. Both systems insist that the corporate reality is prior to the individual. The Christian church and the Marxist Chinese state limit the freedom of the individual and "paradoxically" liberate the individual for service to the neighbor. There are essential differences in the disciplinary process but both make a significant place for "brotherly rebuke" (Christianity) and "criticism" (Maoism). Christian "nurture" is analogous to "reeducation." Chinese revolutionary system of correction appears like a secular version of Matt. 18.

6. The analogy of heresy. All through its history, Christianity has struggled against "false teaching." Chinese Marxism struggles similarly against "revisionism." The need for the interpretation and reinterpretation of orthodoxy over against which ideas and attitudes may be judged is felt by both traditions. Related to this are social and psychological attitudes of acceptance and rejection as saints judge sinners within the Christian community and the "politically conscious" judge the "unaware" within the communist state.

8. The analogy of decision-making. Both Christianity as interpreted by Mennonites and Marxism as interpreted by Mao uphold an ideal form of decision-making through "consensus." The dynamics of the "discerning community" according to the Believers' Church model is similar in many respects to the dynamics of the "revolutionary committee"--the basic decision-making body in cities and communes.

9. The analogy of sexual morality. China's attitude toward sexual morality is as it were "a page out of the New Testament." Sexual deviation is simply regarded with horror! The strictest Puritan ethic is no more conservative than the Maoist ethic.

10. The analogy of liberation. "Liberation" is shared by both traditions as a word describing release from bondage. It is another way of speaking of salvation. The human experience of liberation from oppression is analogous to the religious experience of liberation from sin. Chinese give testimonies in which Mao and Christ could be interchanged without violence.

There are, however, essential differences between the Chinese Revolution and Christianity. Here are a few:

1. The most glaring difference lies in the area of individual freedom. The voluntary principle in Christian faith is absent in Maoism. All major choices are made by the state--choices governing work, habitation, education, and political philosophy. Furthermore, in China one cannot opt out of the system. This is the major difference between belonging to the Marxist state and belonging to the church--a most significant difference.

2. Another difference has to do with metaphysics. Christianity rests upon belief in transcendent reality. Communism denies transcendence. Hence, attitudes toward the ultimate source of things differ fundamentally. Maoism implies a secular, scientific, nationalistic world view. Hence, the "mystical" quality of life disappears. There is no theoretical place for "ecstasy" or "tragedy."

Mystery is wiped away by the steel brush of modernity. Marriage, birth, fate and death have lost their mystical tinge. Weddings, festivals and funerals are routine and perfunctory. Metaphysical speculation, fantasy, superstition have been recast into a "mythology" of revolution and the "romance" of corporate productive life.

3. Another difference concerns the difference between a monolithic and a pluralistic society. In pointing out this difference between social systems I am possibly comparing totalitarianism and democracy rather than Marxism and Christianity. Christianity to my knowledge is not committed to a single social system. Nevertheless, if one rejects in principle the corpus christianum, i.e., the unity of Christianity and society, one is committed to a social pluralism within which the church becomes one of many groups. In China there is only one reality outside the individual and that is the state. Within the state all realms of human experience--economics, education, morality, transportation, the military, marriage and ideology are melted together under the rubric of "politics." In China there is no escape from the impact of the whole by identification with a part. Also, there is no distinction between private and public affairs. The state does it all!

4. Another important difference concerns the use of force. Essential to China's Revolution is the use of force. China is by no means nonresistant. In the early days of the Revolution, a ruling class was destroyed either physically or socially and economically by the use of arms. The revolution occurred at "the end of the gun barrel." Admittedly today China seems to be a most peaceful and nonviolent society. Police with guns cannot be found--only a low profile army in the background. At any rate, a theological appraisal of China must include China's use of force.

In light of the striking similarities and differences between Christianity, as we know it, and Chinese communism, one is forced to do two things: (1) One must conclude that China should be viewed theologically, i.e., it must be seen as an historical development with special relevance to the purposes of God. One dare not ignore 800 million people, especially a nation resembling the Christian ideal in so many ways. (2) At the same time one dare not identify China with Christianity as such. How then shall we think of China?

I must confess that I am not sufficiently acquainted with China to come to a conclusion. Only an intimate knowledge of that intriguing land would provide the base for a theology of China. Therefore, I can only share with you some questions which keep running through my mind.

Should we consider China under Mao as Persia under Cyrus in the Old Testament? In the prophecy of Isaiah, Cyrus, a pagan king, is referred to as "his anointed." "I girded thee, though thou hast not known me" (45:5). Could it be possible that God may have "anointed" Mao to serve His purposes? Would it be appropriate for us to look at Mao in the providence of God as one called to "save" some 800 million from chaos and destruction? Could God be using Mao as a leader to call the church and, indirectly, the Western nations to justice, order, peace, simplicity and morality? Could it be that God has given up the West to moral and economic disintegration and He looks paradoxically to China as the fulfillment of His purposes?

To put the question in more Christological terms, is the Spirit of Christ embodied <u>incognito</u> by the Chinese? From a biblical point of view this would

be a theological possibility by way of a logos Christology. The prologue of John's gospel and Colossians (1:15-20) identify Jesus as the logos (Word) which is the creative and ordering power of the universe. Is this power being manifest in a special way among the Chinese? Are the Chinese in this way responding to the Spirit of Christ without knowing it?

Or shall we take a completely cynical view of the moral and technological achievements of China and simply write it off as the early phase of a revolutionary process which will eventually become corrupted as it faces the facts of history--complexity, affluence, privilege, individualism? And furthermore, is the incredible order, morality and austerity of China inherently tied to a closed society?

The theological problem is to come to terms with the contradiction between what may be called the Christological and the anthropological implications of China. That is to say, one could agree that God may be at work in bringing about a "kingdom" which embodies to a remarkable degree the principles of justice, service, morality, order and productivity. Were one to think of God's work in terms of the "Lordship of Christ" or the "Word," the way would be open for a Christological interpretation of China, adventurous and risky as that may be. However, when one reflects upon the evident lack of individual freedom within China's "closed" society, the anthropological considerations raise many problems. Quite apart from the fact that the Chinese deny in theory and in practice the existence of "free will," Chinese society makes inadequate provision for certain kinds of freedom which some of us have considered essential to humanity. To be sure it can be argued that there is a danger in equating Christian freedom with democratic freedom. Some would claim that western society is going to pieces because democratic freedom has come to mean that "everybody does his thing." However, I feel that a far greater amount of freedom is implied by the Christian view of man than is granted in China at the present time. Possibly China will "loosen up" after its "greater" needs for subsistence are guaranteed.

While postponing judgment until I know more about China, I believe that China must be taken seriously--not only as a world power but as a place where God may be at work. We must remember that the God of the Bible has achieved His purposes in strange ways--much to the surprise of many of His people. And of course, we cannot overlook the fact that the Chinese seem to be acting in a more Christian manner than most professing Christians.

J. Lawrence Burkholder has been president of Goshen College since 1971. He served in China 1945-48 as representative for Mennonite Central Committee and Church World Service. Following service in China he taught Bible and philosophy at Goshen College, 1949-61, and was head of the Department of the Work of the Church at Harvard Divinity School 1961-70. The summer of 1975 he spent 21 days touring in China.

Editorial Comment

Modern China represents one of the most important social experiments in human history. The experiment is not yet finished, but it is already the subject of intense interest and study. Especially for Americans the changing political relations between the Peoples Republic of China and the United States have given impetus to new interest in China.

Traditionally scholars have found much about China that was inscrutable. The Chinese felt no particular mission to interpret themselves to the rest of the world. Much of this traditional attitude persists. After gathering observable facts and data, the student still has not penetrated to the soul of the people. The flow of reports from China today generally have this important limitation so that the views we are given are partial at best.

Yet important studies are appearing. The West must educate itself to the new China in spite of barriers to full understanding. These studies span the spectrum of human activity. Several are of special interest to missionary thought. First, historical studies are not only filling in the more recent period but treating neglected areas. Foremost among recent publications is the volume edited by John K. Fairbank, The Missionary Enterprise in China and America (Harvard, 1974). This book holds up a mirror to the missionary movement enabling the reader to see prominent characteristics of China missions which could not be seen as clearly heretofore. Fairbank contends that the dynamics of missionary action stemmed from the cultural dynamics of western society. In the case of the American these forces included nationalism, industrialism and religious revivalism. Whether missionary action was expressed in benign or bellicose terms, it was felt by the Chinese as a movement of invasion. Missions contributed more to China's political development than has been recognized. The father of modern China, Sun Yat Sen, was influenced by Christianity to work for political change. Numerous other Chinese were moved by both positive and negative reactions to the Christianity represented to them by missionaries.

Second, China presents a political option which "Third World" nations cannot ignore. If the "Third World" cannot ignore China, neither can the West. Amidst poverty, population pressures, diminishing per capita food supplies, disorder and corruption, a system which offers an alternative must be taken seriously. Man's temporal needs demand to be met. China demonstrates the power of an ideology combined with superior organization to respond to elemental human needs.

Third, the missiological implications of China will need to be studied for a long time to come. Immediately following the closing of China in 1950 to all Christian missionaries attempts were made to understand what this meant for the future of Christian missions. Today we are only returning to some of the questions raised in the early 1950s. The difference is that Mao's government has succeeded and survived nearly thirty years. The new Chinese system of values has been based on the insight that human nature must be changed if the character of society is to be altered. Mao has attempted to "convert" the Chinese people to a new way of life without the aid of any supernatural power.

Chinese critics of the missionary movement have pointed out the way missions served western political purposes. They protested against the lack of correspondence between the Christian proclamation and the Christian performance. Christian missions inevitably come under scrutiny for the extent to which the message and power of Jesus Christ have been allowed to get through to people and the degree to which "false stones of stumbling" have been placed on the path to heaven.

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FOR MISSION LEADERS

MISSION-FOCUS

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The Anabaptist Vision and Our World Mission

I. Robert L. Ramseyer
II. Takashi Yamada

The Anabaptist Vision and Our World Mission (I)

Robert L. Ramseyer

I. Definition

A half century of concentrated study of the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage has left us with a variety of statements defining the essential core of the original Anabaptist vision.

For the purpose of this paper it should be sufficient to say that the Anabaptist vision was the vision of people who believed that the Christian is called to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ; that being a faithful follower means living according to guidelines which have come both from the teachings and example of Jesus himself and from the teachings and examples of those who were active in the church during the apostolic age; that the only reliable source of these guidelines is the Scriptures; and that the Christian life is normally to be lived through participation in a community of similarly committed people who constitute the true church. It should be clear that this is a vision, a goal, and that no claim is made that any or all of the Anabaptists were totally faithful to this vision, any more than the original apostles perfectly embodied in their lives their own understanding of what being faithful to Jesus should mean.

II. Faithfulness and the first generation[1]

This paper deals primarily with one essential element in the Anabaptist vision, an element which is often overlooked, perhaps because as a sociological element it appears to be unimportant in what may be thought of as an essentially theological vision. The original Anabaptists were all first generation people--people who in becoming Anabaptists consciously rejected their backgrounds, including

their religious heritage, as being part of the "world." It is the thesis of this paper that this simple sociological fact of coming from a non-Anabaptist background to the Anabaptist faith is an essential part of that faith. This "first generationness" does not refer to the genuineness of conversion nor to the psychological trauma associated with being born again. But it is this "first generationness" which is at the root of the difference between Anabaptists and Mennonites.

When an Anabaptist joined the movement, he was conscious of the fact that his new faith had separated him both from his own heritage and from those around him who did not share in that faith. He was a new person, sure of his relationship to God and sure that this new way was God's way. Everything which was not part of this new way was worthless. Thus the Anabaptist was free. When he made decisions, he was unencumbered by practical considerations about what might happen to the heritage, to the church, to church institutions. As a person with no heritage except the New Testament, he needed only to be concerned about the will of God as the new people of God understood it. Such radical faithfulness is never possible for us in later generations regardless of the genuineness or depth of our faith. We recognize a faith and institutional heritage which has been handed down to us as coming from God and worthy of preservation. With this concern for preservation has come also a tendency to minimize separation from others, a tendency to play down the uniqueness of our faith and to demonstrate that we also are good citizens playing a useful role in the world.

When an Anabaptist joined the movement, the only things which separated him from outsiders were things related directly to his faith. The Anabaptists were conscious of being a people, the people of God; but the marks of that peoplehood all came from their relationship to God. Ethnic lines never corresponded to nor reinforced lines of faith. Because we are not a first generation people, this has not been possible for us as Mennonites. There are many things which have nothing to to do with faith which set us apart from others.

Because we are not a first generation people, we have neither the radical separateness of faith on the one hand nor the lack of ethnic separateness on the other hand which nurtured and made possible the Anabaptist vision and movement.

This shift in the basis of our peoplehood, from being the people of God to becoming an ethnic group, this loss of what I have called first generation radicalness, is true not only of the biological and cultural descendants of those first Anabaptists in Europe. These same attitudes also seem characteristic of many of the Mennonite churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Here too there is a concern for preservation. We want to be part of society rather than separate; we feel a need to demonstrate that we are good citizens and that our faith will make a positive contribution to national development; we want to show that our church is a useful institution in society; we strive to prove that we are as authentic in our society as are any of our fellow citizens. Rather than demonstrating a radical difference between the people of God and this world, we try to gloss over it, making that difference as small as possible. Part of our problem may be a genuine misunderstanding about the role of a follower of Jesus Christ

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in human society. Part of our problem comes from a concern for the welfare and preservation of the church. And there is no way that we can be followers of Jesus Christ, at least as the Anabaptists understood what it means to be a follower, if our primary concern is for the welfare and preservation of any institution. If in the process of decision-making we qualify the radicalness of a step we might take by a concern for the survival of the church, we have left Jesus' way. Jesus' words about seeking to save our life and losing it apply just as much to the church as to the life of the individual disciple.

III. The Recovery of original radicalness

If this shift from Anabaptism to Mennonitism, from radicalness to accommodation to the world, from a concern to follow Christ alone to a concern for the preservation of a church and a heritage is inevitable after the first generation, where does that leave us?

It is the thesis of this paper that the only way in which we can share in the Anabaptist vision is to share in the experience of first generation Christians. The only way to be genuine disciples of Jesus Christ is to be part of a group which is sociologically, ideologically, and attitudinally first generation. There are two ways that one might work at this. We could say to our children, "This church is for us. You must go off and do your own thing. Begin your own church as you feel God's Spirit leading you." This would force our children to be first generation Christians. But this we cannot do because we believe that what we have is vital for all people, including our own children. How could we say to them, "We will accept people from our generation who are out in the world, but we will not accept you, nor will we train you in the faith. You must do this on your own."

A second possibility is to become so vitally engaged in mission that a large proportion of our group will always in fact be first generation Christians. It means becoming so open in listening for God to speak to us through our brothers and sisters, regardless of how long they have been committed to following Christ, that our group decision-making will always reflect the consciousness of having moved from the world to the people of God. It requires becoming so vitally and radically committed to Christ in our group life that none of our biological children will want to be part of the group unless they fully share this commitment. Such a group would strive consciously to be so open and fluid, so radically committed to Jesus Christ as we find Him in the New Testament, that it would never develop a static institutional heritage which would need to be defended. Without this orientation the church will inevitably become an end in itself, something to be preserved rather than a means to the end of being faithful. For faithfulness includes the mission of bringing others to faithfulness to Jesus Christ. An effort to preserve always brings accommodation to the world.

Thus the Anabaptist vision, the New Testament vision, can only be recovered in a group whose conscious orientation is to the first generation, to those who have made the radical step from the world to the people of God, to those whose allegiance has shifted from allegiance to the institutions of human society to faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Such a group has no heritage other than the heritage of following Christ, a heritage marked by an openness to taking a completely new look at the New Testament in each generation to see what faithfulness to Christ means in its own day. Such a group is truly a people, the people of God, but the only marks of its peoplehood, the only cultural traits which its members have in common and which distinguish them from those who are not part of this people, are the marks which come directly from following Christ.

From this it should be obvious that there can be no Anabaptist vision apart from mission, apart from sharing this vision with others as the way of being faithful to Jesus Christ.

IV. Anabaptists in mission

If the Anabaptist vision, a vision which we assume to be the New Testament vision, can only be recovered in mission, we need to think yet about what this vision says to the nature of mission. What differences does the vision bring to mission itself? We are all familiar with the so-called modern missionary movement and the spread of the Christian church around the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We also know of the participation of Mennonites in this general missionary endeavor. The Mennonite World Conference illustrates graphically the presence of Mennonites around the world. But we are also painfully aware that neither participation in mission nor being a newly formed church is guarantee that a New Testament church, a church of people committed to Jesus Christ, will result. Mennonite participation in the modern missionary movement has not been a recovery of the Anabaptist vision. The churches which have grown up out of this missionary activity have in most cases shown as little of that radical commitment to Jesus Christ which we have termed the Anabaptist vision as have the older Mennonite churches of the West.

Part of the problem is that we who have gone out as Western Mennonite missionaries have not really understood what it means to be the people of God, that is, aliens and pilgrims as far as the societies of this world are concerned. When we have been less enlightened, we have identified the Christian faith with the ethnic characteristics of the Mennonite churches from which we have come. We have tried to found churches which were like the churches of Gronau or Lancaster or Saskatoon. And these churches have grown up as little islands separated from the people around them. They have been separated, however, not on the basis of what faithfulness to Jesus Christ demands, but on ethnic characteristics brought from another country.

When we have been more enlightened as missionaries, we have realized the danger of bringing along our own cultural characteristics with the gospel and have tried to help indigenous churches come into being. Unfortunately these churches became truly indigenous, at home in their world, not seeing that faithfulness to Jesus Christ demands a critical look at their world and their cultural traditions, not seeing that loyalty to Him inevitably cuts across loyalty to one's nation and one's people, no matter what that nation and people are. We fell into the trap of seeing the church as somehow serving as a replacement for previous religious institutions so that without realizing it the Christian faith came to be interpreted as a new and superior civil religion.

The Anabaptist vision says that to be a Christian one can have only one Lord, Jesus Christ, and that being a Christian means being His disciple. The Anabaptists understood that being a disciple meant being called out of the world, whatever that world was--North American, Latin American, African, European, or Asian. Whether it is an eastern or a western world makes no difference. Christian disciples live in a state of constant alienation from the natural human societies in which they find themselves.

One of the practical consequences of this understanding of discipleship for Christian mission is that the Anabaptist takes seriously Jesus' talk about the narrow gate and the real difficulty of passing through it. The Anabaptist would have no part in trying to broaden that gate so that people could pass through it in greater numbers more easily. But at the same time the Anabaptist will try to be

very sure that the gate really is Christ's gate and that it is not narrowed because of other things which have nothing to do with loyalty to Jesus Christ. Thus the Anabaptist missionary will try to make clear from the beginning that the message includes a call to loyalty to Jesus Christ and to Him alone. He will try to spell out as clearly as possible what this may mean. This model comes from Jesus himself who called men to Him promising rest and release on the one hand, but also told them sharply and in some detail of the conflict and persecution which would come if they followed Him. The Anabaptist missioner can never say, "These people are too new to be faced with this all at once. Let us simply present the promises of Jesus and bring them into the church. After they are in, we can gradually talk about commitment and loyalty to Jesus Christ and what these will mean in daily life." Rather the Anabaptist missioner emphasizes the sharpness, the radicalness of the step from the natural society in which people live into the people of God. To the Anabaptist the call of Jesus Christ is a call to radical, fully committed discipleship from the very beginning. Obviously, only gradually and throughout our lives do we understand the implications of what this commitment means for the way in which we live. However the commitment itself is never gradual; it is sharp, radical, complete from the beginning. And the sharpness of this commitment stands out most clearly when the company of disciples is full of those who have made this decision consciously as they moved from the world to discipleship in the people of God.

Since Anabaptists do not separate faith from life and doctrine from ethics, commitment and discipleship will make a difference in the concrete ways in which they live day by day. Their commitment will be something which people can see. For the Anabaptist there is no possibility of being either a secret Christian or an invisible church.

One of the most apparent distinctives of a church with the Anabaptist vision will be the quality of fellowship and mutual concern which it displays. Within the fellowship there will be nothing of the distinctions between groups which may be found in the natural society from which its members have come. Within the Christian fellowship class, caste, clan, nation and family distinctions have no relevance. The church will be the one fellowship in which people can come together without reference to the society in which they were born. Here social boundaries have no meaning.

This quality of fellowship has special relevance to the condition in which most human beings find themselves today. On the one hand our world is divided among social groups which demand contradicting loyalties and set people against people in a multiplicity of settings. People are more open than ever to the reconciling force which can be released within a group where all members share a common commitment to Jesus Christ.

On the other hand our world is also experiencing the rapid breakdown of what for many people have been their traditional primary reference groups. Rapid social change in the face of urbanization and industrialization has left many people feeling isolated in a confusing mass of humanity. They are isolated individuals with no one to turn to for help and counsel, no one to care whether they live or die. Here the Anabaptist fellowship with its care and concern for individual people, a fellowship in which people are committed to each other because of their common commitment to Jesus Christ, comes as the answer to an urgent need. The church becomes the new family for its members, the family of God. As Jesus said, "Here are my mother and my brothers."

Coming from this background, the Anabaptist disciple is also uniquely equipped to speak to the work of reconciliation in the larger human society. Disciples are peacemakers who work at the reconciliation of human groups through the abolition of social injustices which bring conflict between persons or between groups because of their own firm rooting in the Anabaptist fellowship.

Closely related to this is the Anabaptist's emphasis on love and nonresistance in all relationships. Obviously this goes far beyond the refusal of Christians to take part in their country's military activities, although it will certainly include such a refusal. Because Anabaptists are clear in their giving of primary loyalty to Jesus Christ, they will be able to resist all efforts of their states to make them take sides for their nation against the peoples of other nations. They will see clearly that loyalty to a government which would make them regard people of another nation as less worthy of concrete acts of love than the people of their own nation is in direct conflict with their loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Obviously, in many situations this will cause Anabaptists to be regarded as enemies of the people, as traitors to their class or to their nation, as disreputable members of their society. But the Anabaptist knows that just as God's love is not limited by any human boundaries, love which springs from commitment to Jesus Christ also cannot be limited by the boundaries which human beings may choose to erect. Our priorities are clear. I am first of all a disciple of Jesus Christ and only secondarily an American or Zairois or Japanese or Canadian or Brazilian or German. I know that in every case there will be conflict between what my commitment to Christ requires and what my natural human groupings demand of me. I can never satisfy both.

Finally, the church with the Anabaptist vision is distinguished by the active and full-time participation of all of its members. The Anabaptist fellowship does not leave mission to experts. All members are fully and actively engaged in its mission.

This is the role of the Anabaptist vision in our world mission as I understand it. It is in its very essence irresponsible and unrealistic by the standards of any natural human society. It maintains that as disciples of Jesus Christ, as the people of God, we are in our first loyalty members of a different society which has its own standards of evaluation.

This is only a vision; it is not a program. The challenge which comes to us is to keep this vision clearly before us as we make our program decisions, the challenge to make all of our decisions in mission in the clear light of this vision.

From 1954 to 1972 Robert Ramseyer was a missionary in Japan with the General Conference Mennonite Commission on Overseas Mission. Since 1972 he has been Director of the Overseas Missions Training Center, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Elkhart, Indiana. He has contributed articles on anthropology and missiology to journals such as Missiology and Japan Christian Quarterly. This paper was originally presented to the expanded Mennonite World Conference Presidium in San Juan, Puerto Rico, July 1975.

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[1] In what follows I am indebted to John H. Yoder, "Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality," in A. J. Klassen (ed.), Consultation on Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology. Fresno: Council of Mennonite Seminaries, 1970.

The Anabaptist Vision and Our World Mission (II)

Takashi Yamada

I. Theme and approach

In trying to understand the Anabaptist movement and vision, we cannot ignore already existing definitions and concepts. These are no doubt important and helpful. Yet to develop one's thought on that basis may limit his ideas to a certain fixed framework and mold his thought by what already exists.

On the other hand, any approach or system of thought can grasp only a part of the whole. So whenever we try to approach to any living reality, we inevitably grasp it in some distorted ways. Even so, our sincere efforts to seek for the reality or the truth can deepen and enlarge our thoughts further. Repeating this patiently, we may come closer to the truth.

Another thing we need to consider as we approach the subject is that we non-ethnic Mennonites should not swallow blindly what our western brethren have inherited and developed in the course of their history. I feel keenly that we need to create our own unique visions in the particular cultural backgrounds of our own lands and nations, strikingly inspired by the original experiences of the early Anabaptists.

This is true in many other fields of study and discussion, and especially so when we deal with the Anabaptist vision. For our very subject, the Anabaptist vision itself, challenges us to make voluntary and responsible choices and commitments before God, based on the strength of our own identities in Christ.

II. The Anabaptist Vision

When I read H. S. Bender's well-known definition of the Anabaptist vision many years ago for the first time, it inspired me. I understood it as a beautiful doctrinal expression of our Mennonite position. I wanted to know what it really meant in the context of my own life and ministry. I struggled with it for years after that as I continued to minister to a local congregation, trying to find our Mennonite identity.

One problem I had with definitions such as Bender's is that I often felt as if I had been trying to find my loved one through a frosted glass. Bender's sword just didn't clash with mine. There was something which kept me from perceiving it in a real way. The problem may lie in finding in present reality what was described historically.

Then several years ago, I thought of trying to grasp the Anabaptist vision from two angles: in the context of living relationships of creative tension within the fellowship of disciples of Christ, and outer confronting tension between the fellowship and the outside world.

A. An intense attitude of confrontation. I understand that the Anabaptist vision is neither something which can be grasped as a package of doctrines, nor a spiritual heritage wrapped up with some specific abstract or worn out theological terms that can be superficially transmitted to people in later ages. It may

be understood as a certain striking force that captures and drives some people, and directs them into a unique and creative way of living.

If we dare to try to describe it, it is an attitude of a dynamic living. Ordinary people of the world may regard it as a peculiar way of living. It is a particular attitude which comes out of a certain religious conviction. Finally, we can say that it is "an attitude of confrontation." It is a confrontation with demonic power which tries to control and oppress men, distorts and destroys man's society.

Essentially, this attitude may be created within and among us when we are confronted with Jesus, His life and His attitude of living in a unique and dynamic way. Once I read that the Mennonites used to grow beards to show that they were different from others, that their way of living was different from that of ordinary people of the world. The attitude of confrontation is seen in this kind of radicalness of man's life.

In the sixteenth century Anabaptists' situations, it was a confrontation with the Reformers and their churches which promoted their reformation work by compromising with the secular political powers. It was a confrontation with the European tradition of "Corpus Christianum," which by then had lasted for more than a thousand years.

When we think about political powers, we tend to distinguish between evil ones and good ones. It may not always be wrong to do this, but at least we need to recognize that any political power or human government basically has power to control people for its own purposes. It is important to distinguish the radicalism of mainstream Anabaptists from that of those who resorted to violence. We will come back to this point later.

B. The structure of the attitude of confrontation. To view the Anabaptist vision as a confronting attitude is not sufficient. We need to look into its inner structure and see how it functions. The attitude has its inner structure of living integrity in Christ. It means that we see the attitude being taken in a field of certain personal relationships in dynamic spiritual tension. There is a creative tension between Christ and those who are following after Him, and among the followers themselves, as well as a confronting tension between the world and the fellowship of Christ's followers.

As fish can only live in water, this confronting attitude may exist only in a certain field of spiritual tensions caused by the living Christ. When the attitude is taken, we find some specific expressions of spiritual tension in the actual historical setting. If we try to systematize and formulate them into some traditional doctrinal terms, they may be defined best as "discipleship," "believers church" and "ethic of love and nonresistance."

From an ideological point of view, we may describe this inner dynamic structure as follows:

1. Deepening individual self--finding and establishing one's self-identity in Christ (discipleship).
2. Extension of the liberated life--forming a voluntary fellowship of believers (believers church).
3. Maturity of the liberated life--developing solidarity and integrity of man's society in Christ (love and nonresistance).

These aspects are vitally and inseparably related to and overlap with each other. They coexist, forming the attitude of confrontation. This is the dynamic of the Anabaptist vision. If the spiritual tension loosens, the whole attitude gets out of shape. If either one of those aspects of the inner structure becomes weak or disappears, the attitude becomes weak and collapses.

C. The confronting attitude as an antithesis to the fallen reality of man and his society. The Anabaptist vision, grasped in the way described above, encourages us to see that the vision was something possible, and it is still possible even today. I was struck by the forceful witness of the Anabaptist vision when I began to understand it in this way.

We see this confronting attitude and the structure of its inner dynamic being taken and working in a perfect way in the life of Jesus. We also see the same thing happening in the life of the group of early disciples, in spite of their human weaknesses and failures. It was actually the work of the living Christ in them.

Jesus stood on the side of the common people of His day, especially those who were considered to be religiously and socially alienated and unqualified to belong to the Jewish society. They were suffering severely under the double oppression and exploitation of both the Roman government and the Jewish religio-political power structures of the day. Standing on the side of these people, Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God and its blessing being extended even to these people.

By doing that, Jesus assumed an intense attitude of confrontation with the existing power structures. He lived the life of genuine love and nonresistance and finally ended up in the suffering death on the cross, being punished as a political criminal by the Roman government. It was the most powerful confrontation that has ever appeared in man's history. It gave a fatal blow to the demonic powers of the world.

Through the coming of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the fellowship of those who were willing to follow Jesus' steps was formed. They took the same confronting attitude with the world powers and at the same time expanded their fellowship, witnessing God's mighty saving power to the people outside of the Church.

In the sixteenth century Anabaptist movements, we see the inevitable confrontation between "corpus Christianum" and "corpus Christi." The intention of the Anabaptists to form "corpus Christi" as well as their lives of love and non-resistance instead of domination by force and violence over one's fellowmen declare this confrontation.

Most of the reformers of those days seemed to have run away into the realms of the concept and theory of their reformation. They tried to build up their religion and churches on those concepts and theologies. They started with a certain confronting attitude, but later they compromised and shook hands with the existing worldly powers, endorsing the use of force to suppress the movements of Anabaptists and the common people. They lost their balance in keeping up confronting attitude. The Anabaptists went right on with their confronting attitude. In this way they became an antithesis to the Reformers.

D. Some negative aspects of the Anabaptist vision. As sixteenth century Anabaptists lived in the actual context of history, they and their movements

were of course limited and influenced by their environments and conditions as well as their weaknesses. To be an antithesis to the fallen reality of the world is significant. But the antithesis itself has some weaknesses as antithesis.

While the Anabaptists functioned to relativize the authoritative religious and political power structures, their nonconformity with the world seemed to have often given up the possibilities and persistent efforts to bring changes in the existing social systems. Later Mennonites came to have a sort of "pure church" idea and became closed religious groups isolated from the world. It is right to say that the "church is not of the world," but that does not mean that we can disregard the fact that the church is in the world. If the "antithesis" comes out of its context and begins to walk by itself, it becomes a fixed tradition which later Mennonites tried hard to preserve for themselves.

E. Progressive succession of the vision. The Anabaptist vision should be recovered and reinterpreted as its living context continues to change. The Anabaptist vision cannot be simply defined as one of the reformation movements or the movement of "restitution" to the primitive church. We are not to go back to the past. We need to catch the vision anew constantly in our given situations. The Anabaptist vision makes us open to our future.

Often our confronting attitude seems to come to a deadlock and experiences many failures because of its own nature as a confrontation. The vision may go on fulfilling something even if we suffer setbacks and defeats. It is not something we can discuss on the level of "success" or "nonsuccess," "victory or defeat."

III. Our world mission

The following are some of my basic ideas as to our world mission today.

A. Antithesis to our own reality. If we want to recover the Anabaptist vision, we must know, first of all, that the vision is an antithesis to our own reality. Here we need to be very specific, dealing with each actual situation and reality in Asia, Africa and other parts of the world.

B. Total involvement in our total life. The Anabaptist vision challenges us to follow Christ, not only in the realms of personal life and the life of a religious group, but also in the midst of today's social, economic and political situations of the secular world. The fact that the Anabaptists rejected infant baptism and boldly took radical action by performing adult baptism by themselves was taken up by the establishment as a serious issue directly related to the politics of those days. Consciously and inevitably they challenged the political realm, motivated by their genuine and thoroughgoing obedience to Jesus.

C. Anti-western thought as characteristic of Anabaptism. Anabaptism, which was born in a certain period of western history, is an antithesis to the stream of thought and history of the medieval and modern west. If the Anabaptist movement was a confrontation with traditional western Christianity and "Constantinianism," it must be an antithesis and a judgment on modern western Christian society which, as a whole, has not been able to overcome essentially that "Constantinianism." (The "Christian west," however, has broken down, and passed into the "post-Christian era," as modern secularization has progressed rapidly.)

Anabaptism is a judgment on scientific rationalism. Western scientific rationalism depends greatly upon man's scientific technology as a result of man's own

knowledge and power. It is devoted to bringing out efficiency-centered ideas and practices, placing a lopsided value on development and progress. It tends to disregard the importance of the nonrational and that which cannot be quantified.

Western civilization in due course has found its outlets to the East and other parts of the world. It has made great impact upon the peoples in those parts of the world. Against this historical background of the expansion of western civilization into other parts of the world, the worldwide extension of western Christianity through the modern missionary movements occurred.

This movement should be evaluated rightly and regarded highly. But at the same time we should not overlook the fact that sometimes it has resulted in "westernization" or "western Christianization" of the people in the non-Western world. Here the critical function of the Anabaptist vision comes in. The Anabaptist vision encourages and inspires world mission in its true sense, but it also discourages and denies modern Constantinianism on a worldwide scale, or worldwide Christianization as something like "Coca-Colization."

D. Creativity of the Anabaptist vision. The Anabaptist vision functions not only as an antithesis but also as a dynamic creative power to bring the individual and society into true integrity in Christ. Sixteenth century Anabaptists unconsciously played a role which gave rise within western culture to modern civil freedom.

Unfortunately the Anabaptists themselves could hardly develop this aspect of their vision because of the severe persecution and unpeaceful situations in which they were placed. Among the later Mennonites we see much of their energy and efforts being spent in preserving their tradition within ethnic communities. (We can be appreciative and grateful, however, for their sincere efforts to preserve the "Anabaptist Vision." Without it, we would likely not be discussing the "Anabaptist Vision and our World Mission" today.)

IV. Some practical concerns in our world mission

A. Reexamination of the old philosophy of mission. When we look at the situation of the third world after World War II, we note the sweeping waves of the rise of nationalism among those peoples who had suffered under the old western colonialism.

In spite of the fact that many of those nations in the third world have achieved their independence, they are still suffering greatly from the various leftover phenomena of the old colonialism. They are struggling with diverse and difficult domestic problems such as their economic difficulty caused by mono-culturization and deformed economic conditions, and other social problems caused by it. They have also faced critical international problems since their independence.

The remaining influences of the old colonialism are not easily overcome, even by political independence and changes brought about in political and social systems. These nations need to make tremendous self-improvement efforts for many years to come. Even here in the very process of this self-improvement and development, the overwhelming power of the advanced nations constantly intervenes in their strenuous efforts of building up their own nations. Here I am not only referring to the neocolonialism of the west but also the recent economic invasions by Japan.

We have to consider seriously the weight of this historical background when we look at overseas missions. Foreign missions in the western Christian churches have not always played their part as antitheses to the colonialism of their own countries. Overseas mission work has not always been carried out through vicarious suffering of missionaries on behalf of their own nations' domination of peoples in the mission fields. We scarcely notice a strong sense of grief and the spirit of redeeming the past wrongs of colonialism on the side of the sending churches. Sometimes overseas mission could be carried out with a feeling of the rich giving to the poor. (I personally dislike saying this for I know so many excellent and faithful missionaries who are devoting their lives for the sake of other people.)

With regard to Mennonite overseas missions in the past years, we "younger" Mennonites must express our deep appreciation and praise God for many blessings He has given to the work. Yet Mennonite overseas missions, as far as I know, have not always been done with a thorough understanding and expression of the Anabaptist vision on the side of the older churches. It is not appropriate for western Mennonites to grieve at the products of their mission work, the younger churches, lacking in Anabaptist vision and its practices.

The "Anabaptist Vision" must not simply and naively be tied up with "our world mission" in a short circuit way. If one says that world mission should be carried out in order to recover our Anabaptist vision, he is wrong. This is the reverse of the direction we ought to move.

B. Toward finding a new philosophy of our world mission. As the Swiss Brethren once transcended the nationalism of Zwingli, both the western Mennonites and the third world Mennonites today have to overcome their racial egos and nationalistic egos as well as their group egos so that they may establish their own Mennonite identity. Then they may build up some worldwide solidarity from which real concern for the world mission may come out naturally. This has rich implications and applications on the practical level.

C. Our world mission as nonresistant Mennonites. We have already seen that the Anabaptists' nonresistant position was vitally related to their attitude of confrontation. The confronting attitude expresses itself paradoxically in the ethics of love and nonresistance as it seeks to build up true solidarity among men in Christ. The autonomous self who is liberated in Christ is at the same time the one who appreciates and enjoys peace and tries to produce peace. The Anabaptist vision conflicts with a world mission without pacifism.

In the stream of modern western history since the Middle Ages, western religion, thought and culture have produced or taken an active part in the rise of capitalism and modern scientific technology. These things have encouraged western nations to attempt to conquer nature and dominate the world by power. This domination by power has finally led to the production of nuclear weapons and all kinds of pollution. (Japan has adopted western scientific technology and taken part in the attempt to dominate Asia by power.)

Ever since western civilization with its tremendous economic and military power encountered Oriental civilization, colonialistic domination and tragic distortion of men and eastern societies has been occurring. Now modern western civilization itself has come to a deadlock and is facing serious crisis today. Sixteenth century Anabaptist vision has stood as an antithesis in the stream of the history of domination by power. It may have more possibilities to contribute to the modern world than it had in the sixteenth century world.

Our world has been changing rapidly. We know that since 1965, or even before, the Catholic Church has proclaimed the end of the "Constantinian period." In Asia just some 30 years ago most of the nations were under colonialistic or semi-colonialistic domination of the west and Japan. Since then various religions have played their roles in bringing modernization to Asia. In Vietnam the amazing energy of the Vietnamese Buddhists has led and supported the people to stand up and fight against the colonial domination by France, Japan and then America. Recently in South Korea Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, have been bold enough to stand up against the government which is threatening the freedom of the people. In the large area of Southwest Asia, Islamic religion has been the spiritual ground of many nations who have suffered from western domination, although in Indonesia the situation seems to have been different from those of other countries.

In the midst of these situations in the east, what unique roles will our Anabaptist vision play? And how?

D. Finding the Anabaptist vision anew in the midst of modernization today. The coming of modernization into the third world is an irresistible tide. In many of the Asian and African countries modernization is being strongly promoted and progressing rapidly. As it comes, it changes the whole picture of man's society.

Modernization can be characterized by secularization and urbanization. In "advanced" countries, the so-called "information society" and "mobi-centric society" have appeared. Such ideas as "post-industrial society" or even "post-civilized society" have become popular among some people. At the same time several phenomena of "computerized society" have begun to appear. The possibility of unifying and controlling man and his society by huge computerized systems is becoming greater.

Here again we need to pay attention to the two-fold unique functions of the Anabaptist vision: the secularizing function to relativize man-made systems and the creative function to reconcile men and build up new societies. The mobility of the early Anabaptists and their single lifestyle may have something to say to people in urbanized modern society.

E. Our world mission in evangelism. I take up evangelism at the end of this paper not because I regard it as less important, but I do this in order that we may take up this very important task in its right context, maintaining the proper balance in the whole of our world mission.

Essentially speaking, if we grasp the Anabaptist vision as an attitude of confrontation and try to understand its inner structure in the way described before, evangelism and church planting are concrete expressions of the attitude. Therefore, evangelism covers every aspect of the expressions of the confronting attitude, and it is also comprehended in each aspect of the inner structure of the attitude.

Here the dichotomy of evangelism and social action, or quantitative growth and qualitative growth are transcended by taking up evangelism and church planting on a deeper level. Such a dichotomy may have arisen as the church became fixed and institutionalized and as the work of the church became divided and program-centered. In the early Anabaptist movement we do not find such a dichotomy.

Let me state very briefly the three basic keys to evangelism and church planting:

1. Establishing Mennonite identity.
2. Encouraging as much participation of church members as possible.
3. Deeper permeation into the world and enlarging contacts with people of the world.

Voluntary participation of the third world Mennonites in the world mission should be encouraged. The fixed traditional idea that overseas mission is the work of the western churches needs to be corrected. The present one-way direction of the mission work--from older churches in the west to the "mission field" in the third world--must be changed. Joint mission attempts are to be expected in many parts of the world in coming years.

Present patterns and structures of the churches, conferences, and overseas missions administration as well as the larger Mennonite fellowships, should be more flexible and ready to be reshaped as we are stimulated and inspired by catching the Anabaptist vision on the grass roots level.

This may take a long time and undergo some painful surgical operations. The relations between life and its outward forms or patterns must be carefully studied and considered. More "ad-hocratic" systems of administration need to be developed instead of bureaucratic ones in order to cope with the rapid changes and diverse needs of world situations.

The invention of nuclear weapons and pollution of the natural environment as well as many aspects of man's life, and the possibility of worldwide food shortage have caused human beings to face a serious world crisis today. Indeed, men in the world are now in the same boat, sharing a common fate. The attitude of confrontation in its eschatological tension urges us to have a sympathetic view of the world so that we may actively participate in God's mission in the modern world today.

V. Concluding words

How do we actually renew and refresh our Anabaptist vision and make it live today? It may depend much on our encountering Jesus in striking ways in our lives in this modern age. We must face the words of Jesus from an entirely unique and dynamic point of view in their actual historical contexts and see Him living and moving with His confronting attitude toward man's fallen reality.

However, I feel that the order of this question and answer should be reversed. We can say that if we encounter Jesus in striking ways today, we may forget about our Anabaptist vision. We will then find ourselves being in reality the Anabaptist vision.

Takashi Yamada has been an active churchman. Since 1956 he has been a pastor. He has also served as chairman of the Kyushu Mennonite Christian Church Conference, Japan Mennonite Fellowship, member of Asian Mennonite Conference Executive Committee and Mennonite World Conference Presidium. In addition to various articles, he was coauthor of Experiments in Church Growth (Japan Church Growth Research Association, 1968). This paper was originally presented to the expanded Mennonite World Conference Presidium in San Juan, Puerto Rico, July 1975.

Editorial Comment

Among missiologists' preoccupations today is the search for new models of mission. The missionary movement which emanated from the western churches from the time of Vasco da Gama to World War II was heavily freighted with the Constantinian mentality. The search for new models divides into two categories: the search for new methods and techniques and the search for a new theological framework. The first category is especially prone toward an uncritical acceptance of the status quo and a zealous application of western technology.

It may justifiably be asked why we turn to the sixteenth century if we are searching for new models of mission. In brief, there are two reasons. First, the Radical Reformers (Anabaptists) were the only group within the Reformation whose vision of the church was missionary and actually tried to exist as missionary communities. Second, their critique of the church-society relationship dealt deliberately with the Constantinian mentality which dominated the church. The fact that the Anabaptists did not survive long as a missionary movement does not alter the fact their self-understanding was radically missionary. Their missionary vision called for a new social order.

In terms of historiography, it might be argued that it is appropriate to develop more fully the Anabaptist view of mission. Anabaptist studies have flourished during the present century, and the term "Anabaptist Vision" derives from Harold S. Bender's presidential address to the American Society of Church History in December 1943. In this address Bender sought to define the essence of Anabaptism. Yet this classic statement did not come to terms with the missionary character of Anabaptism. Franklin H. Littell was the first to identify this explicitly in 1947. The process is not yet finished. The "recovery of the Anabaptist Vision" will not be complete until full account is taken of the church as a missionary community.

Not only is there a need to remedy a deficient historiography. This "recovery" movement is itself occurring in a situation undergoing rapid change. This is rightly called the age of universal history. Missiology must come to grips with the universality of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The particularisms of race and nation come under judgment of a universal gospel. The Anabaptists' insistence on the way of suffering love was an earnest of their commitment to a universal gospel. Missiology must also come to terms with the wholeness of the gospel. The false polarities between the transcendent and imminent, vertical and horizontal, spiritual and physical, individual and social, witness and service which have divided Christians and obscured the missionary task must be transcended. The Anabaptist witness points to this wholeness by affirming the power of the gospel to bring about a new creation within history. But it is the new creation which finds completion when all things are ultimately gathered up in Jesus Christ.

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FOR MISSION LEADERS

MISSION-FOCUS

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The Institutionalization of The Church

I. John W. Eby
II. Boyd Nelson

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE CHURCH

by John W. Eby

> "I feel that it is about time that we heard from somebody who isn't a writer, teacher, minister, etc. - just a plain old ordinary person." --Letter to the Editor, Gospel Herald, March 2, 1976.
>
> "I don't know why we need this committee. The staff knows so much more than we do. We may as well just approve their recommendation." --Similar statements heard many times on churchwide committees.

I. Introduction

Both of these statements illustrate one of the dilemmas of the twentieth century Mennonite Church. Never in the history of the Mennonite Church has the work and activity of the church been as highly institutionalized both at the level of local congregations and in churchwide agencies as it is today. The purpose of this article is to explore some of the dilemmas created within the church as the sociological process of institutionalization changes the nature of social interaction and as more and more of the work of the church is done in highly complex organizational structures.

This is not a "finished" article. It is rather an attempt to identify in a heuristic way some of the sociological factors which impinge on the life of the church. We need further analysis and reflection on the way in which the church has structured its activity in order to develop organizational patterns which are consistent with our theological assertions.

Part II describes the process of institutionalization. It is not intended to make a case for institutionalization, but to identify and describe underlying natural social tendencies and to identify characteristics of institutionalized church life. The Mennonite Church does exhibit many characteristics of highly institutionalized structure. The purpose of this article is not to place a value judgment on the social organization of the church, but to point to some of the implications of structure for faith and life.

Part III focuses primarily on the dilemmas of churchwide agencies. The implications of this analysis for local congregations must wait.

A number of terms are used in technical ways in this article. The following list of definitions will help to clarify these usages:

Institutionalization is a process by which societies and social groups develop predictable and stable forms of organization. Every group is somewhere along a continuum ranging from random behavior to highly institutionalized behavior. One of the results of institutionalization is the emergence of formal organizations often called institutions which are called agencies in this article. When the term institutionalization is used, think of the basic social process not a specific agency.

Rational often means "using one's head." In this article it is used in two ways. Rational behavior is that which is consciously directed toward a consequence in the future, where means are directed toward ends. This is contrasted with behavior which results from tradition or conditioned response. Rational is also used to describe a kind of authority which is accepted because of legal reasons or because of a decision that guidance and coordination are needed to accomplish a task.

Professionalization is a process by which a society or group assigns an increasing number of tasks to persons who are highly specialized and have special training for those tasks.

Bureaucracy is a form of social organization in which participants accept a ruling as justified because it agrees with a set of more abstract rules which they consider legitimate. Bureaucracy in organizational theory is often synonymous with rational.

II. The Process of Institutionalization

Religion by its very nature is a social activity. As a consequence, the practice of religion is affected by emergent forms of social interaction little different from those which affect economic or political interaction.

For a group to survive over a period of time, random social interaction must become predictable and patterned. For example, it would be very difficult to have Christian fellowship if there were not a commonly accepted and practiced response to an offered handshake. This one example of many "appropriate" responses patterned into our way of thinking and activity. Values and world views are also structured into the fabric of social groups.

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Litho in USA

The process by which unorganized random interaction becomes structured and predictable is called institutionalization. Institutionalization is the development of predictable, orderly, stable, socially integrating forms and structures out of unstable, loosely patterned or merely technical types of action.

The social process of institutionalization is obviously related to the longevity of a social group or activity. As we have said, some form of institutionalization is necessary for a social activity to survive beyond a chance happening or spontaneous event. On the other hand, the longer a particular group or activity exists, the more highly structured and institutionalized it becomes.

Each group builds into its organization habits, values and vested interests. To a degree, at least, the group is a creature of its own history. The kind of people who have made up its membership shaped the group and adapted its organization to its environment. The outcome may be beneficial if the organization has a stable and distinctive competence and an established reputation. On the other hand, the process of settling down, of becoming established and stabilized can be costly. What began as a vigorous, purposeful group may end up institutionalized, fat, secure and useful, but without its early energy or idealism.

Since the particular focus of this study is on the patterns of institutionalization within the church, it will be instructive to look at two "classic" studies which describe how the process of institutionalization affects religious groups.

A. Routinization of Charisma

Max Weber, a German sociologist and economist, described the way in which leadership and authority based on the charisma of the leader becomes institutionalized into a more traditional or rational form of organization.

This is a particularly helpful insight for religious organizations, since many religious movements begin around the charismatic leadership of one or several persons. For such organizations to survive over time, Weber argued, they will need to routinize or institutionalize methods for choosing leaders, appropriating powers, distributing economic resources and regulating recruitment of new members.

In its pure form charismatic authority has a character foreign to everyday routine structures. The social relationships involved are strictly personal, based on the validity and practice of charismatic personal qualities. The charismatic leader is generally perceived to be heroic, saintly or otherwise peculiarly gifted. He leads and commands loyalty, not because he occupies a high office, but because he is perceived by groups of people as specially deserving of respect and adoration. His leadership and the rules he sets are the basis of the interaction of his followers.

Weber suggests that if this kind of leadership is to be more than a purely transitory phenomenon, it will take on the character of a permanent relationship and form a stable community of disciples, a band of followers, a party organization or any sort of political or hierarchical organization. The character of charismatic authority will become radically changed. In its pure form charismatic authority exists only in the process of originating new movements. It cannot remain stable unless it becomes either traditionalized or rationalized or a combination of both.

Consequently, new groups who leave established churches to follow "new" spiritual insight or an inspirational leader quickly develop forms of organization similar to those in the group they left. Evidences of the routinization of organizational patterns include such things as establishing an organizational office, employing staff persons, publishing a news sheet, developing a special vocabulary and sponsoring regular meetings.

Weber also suggested that it is only in the initial stages of a movement that adherents are willing to devote their lives completely to the practice of the religion. The idealism and total loyalty are eroded as the organizational pattern of a movement becomes more regularized.

B. Church Sect

Another way of looking at the issue of institutionalization of religious structures is through the eyes of Ernst Troeltsch who constructed two ideal types of religious activity. He called the least institutionalized of these a sect and the more institutionalized form a church. It is important to recognize that these are descriptive categories. Like all typologies the distinction should be applied with the understanding that in the real world the distinctions are blurred. Many "churches" have some sect characteristics and conversely a pure "sect" may be hard to find. The categories are nevertheless helpful in specifying the effects of the process of institutionalization on religious groups.

The following summary, adapted from Liston Pope, compares the two types of organization:

Sect	Church
Relation to the social and economic order	
Membership is composed chiefly of the propertyless	Membership is composed chiefly of property owners
Economic poverty in church property and salaries	Economic wealth in property and salaries
A sect is at the cultural periphery of the community	A church is at the cultural center of the community
Renunciation of or indifference to prevailing culture and social organization, including established churches	Acceptance of prevailing values and of the prevailing political and economic order; cooperation with established churches
Self-centered religion based on personal experience	Culture-centered religion based on affirmation of citizenship in an existing community
A social community excluding unworthy members	A social institution embracing all who are socially compatible
Many religious services regardless of interference with other aspects of life	Regular services at stated intervals

Adherence to strict biblical standards, such as tithing	Acceptance of general cultural standards as practical definition of religious obligation
Expressive religious services	Formal religious services
Unspecialized, unprofessional part-time ministry	Specialized, professional full-time ministry
Voluntary, confessional bases of membership	Equal concern for children of members
Emphasis on evangelism and conversion	Emphasis on religious education
A high degree of congregational participation in services and administration	Delegation of responsibility to a small percentage of the members
Ferver and positive action in worship	Restraint and passive listening
Strict standards for membership	Few membership requirements

Two major conclusions may be drawn from studies of the relationship between church and sect.

1. Sects tend to develop into churches. If a sect is strongly interested in seeking new members, it may tend to water down its beliefs and take in people who are not truly committed. Other institutionalizing processes such as the concern for a stable ministry, religious education, respectable buildings, benefit funds, seminaries, and good works help this evolution along. One of the key differences between church and sect is the degree to which members are socialized into the organization through training and education of children in contrast to members being converted from outside the church as adults.

   Not all sects become denominations. However, the more a sect allows institutionalization of its patterns of organization, the more it will tend to exhibit churchly characteristics.

2. There is also a reverse movement from church to sect. This comes about mainly by a process of schism. The watered-down belief and practice, the respectability and accommodation of the church may become unacceptable to some of its members. Thus, the poor may leave middle class churches to form religious groups of their own characterized by a greater purity of belief, emotional fervor, a lay ministry, and an all-encompassing communal life. However, as the founders of the sect become more prosperous and respectable, they become more receptive to church-like organization and behavior.

C. Bureaucracy

As a social group becomes more highly institutionalized, it develops forms of organization based on rational, purposive kinds of behavior. That is to say less behavior is based on custom, magic or tradition and more is based

on volitional decisions which consciously relate actions to their consequences.

While rationality tends to guide all social relations within an institutionalized group, it is most evident in the formation of bureaucratically organized special purpose agencies to do the work of the church. Most modern church bodies have well developed agencies controlling such functions as publication, mission, education, social service, relief, women's work, mutual aid, youth work and practically every other dimension of the work of the church. The Mennonite Church is certainly no exception to this tendency and in fact, for its size may be among the most bureaucratized denominations in the world.

The term "bureaucracy" and its derivatives is used here in a technical sense to label a particular form of social organization. This use is of course quite different from its common usage as a synonym for inefficiency or non-productive "red tape."

Bureaucratic organization is based on rational authority. That is, persons within the organization willingly submit to directions of persons given managerial responsibility. Within a bureaucracy functions are delineated in a systematic division of labor. Tasks are highly specialized and performed by professionals trained for the specialties. There is a hierarchy of authority culminating in an executive who is responsible to a board of control. There is a continuous organization of official functions and work within the bureaucracy bound by rules which are determined by the staff and by the board of control. There are appropriate incentives for work production and conditions for applying sanctions.

The bureaucratic organization is the ultimate form of organization for applying rational principles for utilizing resources for the accomplishment of a task. It is characterized by precision, efficiency, and speed in decision-making.

III. Some Dilemmas and Problems

By now some of the assumptions of the paper should be clear. My analysis and observation of the Mennonite Church indicate that it has become highly institutionalized. The patterns of interaction are routinized and "church"-like. The dominant form of organization in local congregations, conferences and in church-wide agencies is bureaucratic.

It is important to examine some of the dilemmas and problems which face the church because of these patterns of social organization.

A. The Theological Dilemma

Robert Ramseyer suggests in an interesting article in the March, 1976 issue of Mission Focus, "It is the thesis of this paper that the only way in which we can share in the Anabaptist vision is to share in the experience of first generation Christians. The only way to be genuine disciples of Christ is to be part of a group which is sociologically, ideologically and attitudinally first generation." It is interesting that many persons who promote the Anabaptist vision are able to do so because of the luxury afforded them as employees of church institutions who pay their salaries. Such institutions could not exist if the Anabaptist theology suggested by Ramseyer were followed.

It is not enough to suggest, as Ramseyer does, that groups can remain "first generation" by winning new members through evangelism. Existing structural forms have an amazing tenacity. Consequently, new members can be recruited into groups with little or no short term change in the basic institutional pattern. The influx of non-ethnic Mennonites into the Mennonite Church has not had a significant effect on the basic organizational structure of the church in North America. Churches overseas which develop as a result of missionary activity have strong similarity to the groups which sent the missionaries.

The theological dilemma is obvious. There is no way that the church can enjoy the benefits of the current bureaucratically organized mission, seminary, publication, mutual aid and congregational activities and yet still be a "first generation" group. The relevance of Anabaptist theology which emerged in a sectarian movement to a highly institutionalized church is not at all clear.

B. The Professionalization of Church Work

The quotation at the beginning of this article calling for "just a plain old ordinary person" to write for the Gospel Herald illustrates the tendency of highly institutionalized churches and bureaucratically organized agencies to overemphasize professional skills. Some illustrations from the Mennonite Board of Missions are useful. Increasingly upper level staff members are required to have degrees earned in colleges. Missionaries are required to have graduate degrees in theology. There is a decreasing number of openings for VS persons without special training or skills. There is little need for "weekend" or short-term volunteers in Mission Board programming.

There is evidence from the Church Member Profile that there is broad acceptance in the Mennonite Church of the belief that not everyone is "qualified" to do the work of the church. Only 61% agreed that ". . . all members are ministers and should share as they are able in the ministerial functions of the congregations." Only 26% disagreed with the statement that "A church congregation cannot be complete unless there is an ordained minister to lead the congregation and perform the ministerial functions."

As congregations and church agencies specialize, they require professionally trained persons to competently perform the specialized tasks. There is a strong tendency for the practice of religion itself to become a specialty in that kind of environment and to relegate religious activity to the religious professionals. There is a temptation in the church to have missionaries do the missionary task, VSers to do the serving, seminarians to do the theologizing and college faculties the educating.

Again the dilemma is obvious. Is it possible for the church to train and use professionals yet maintain a theology which speaks of the priesthood of all believers?

C. Isolation of Church Agencies

One of the tendencies of bureaucratic church organizations is to isolate themselves from their supporting constituencies.

Theoretically, the agencies are kept responsive through the representative boards of control which the church appoints to set organizational policy. There is evidence within the economic and political sectors that persons in

board positions tend to come from only limited classes of the society. Consequently, they represent only a segment of the society.

There is evidence that a similar elite exists in the Mennonite Church. A superficial study of membership of churchwide boards indicates that nearly 60% of board members receive their salary from the church either as a past pastor or as a church agency staff person. Practically all the remaining board members are professionals in fields related to the board activity. There are very few "average church members." Twelve of the fourteen officers listed in the Yearbook receive their income from the church.

While this superficial survey is not conclusive, it does strongly suggest that the board members of church agencies are not representative of the entire church. There is a particular value pattern and worldview which characterizes the economic and political elite. It would not be surprising at all to discover a similar way of thinking shared by an elite within the church.

In reality boards of control have limited impact on organizational policy. Since staff members have both time and expertise, even with the best of intentions, they control policy. This further isolates agency activity from the "grass roots" church.

Because of the similarity of training, experience and close interaction of church agency staff persons, there is a strong tendency for them to develop into a subculture. The values, worldview, analysis and theology of this group may vary from that of the church and further isolate the agency from the "person in the pew."

D. Professional Leadership

Another important question is focused by looking at the church sociologically. How do leaders emerge? Traditionally leaders emerged from local congregations as persons who knew them well discerned their gifts. As the gifts and strength of character and spiritual wisdom increased, they were looked to for leadership in increasingly wider circles. At each step in the move toward greater responsibility, there was a kind of integrity because of the intimacy with which such persons were known.

Leaders emerge in a quite different way in a highly institutionalized church. They emerge because of their positions as staff persons of church agencies. Less emphasis is placed on strength of character, maturity and spiritual wisdom and more is placed on professional competence. Unfortunately there is no guarantee that spiritual wisdom and professional competence go together. An example of this phenomenon at the congregational level is the shift from choosing pastors from within the congregation to choosing professional ministers with specialized training from outside the congregation.

E. The Dilemma of Organizational Form

Some forms of organization is necessary to apply the varied resources of a group toward a common task. A few of the problems of bureaucratic organization have been identified. Even more problems exist with anarchy and with forms of organization based on charismatic leadership or tradition.

The tendency of bureaucratic organizations is to become isolated from their supporting constituencies. It is possible to develop bureaucratic patterns

which are very much accountable to their supporting groups by requiring them to receive a high percentage of needed resources from the constituency. The constituency must have visible and measurable ways of directing their resources.

Well structured bureaucracies can also work like caring communities of support internally when task expectations are clearly identified. Supervisory relationships can emphasize enabling and growth functions. Bureaucracies can also free persons to take innovative risks.

Many bureaucratic organizations, however, stifle risk-taking and growth by building organizational structures around control functions and by rewarding compliance rather than innovation.

It is important that the church develop organizational structures which use the beneficial and helpful aspects of bureaucracy, yet at the same time, retain freedom from the negative tendencies.

Summary

The limits of this short paper are obvious to the careful reader. Much more careful analysis needs to be done to understand the impact of institutionalization and bureaucratization on the Mennonite Church.

At the risk of being presumptuous, let me suggest some areas for further study and action:

A. More analysis is needed of the organizational structure of the church.

B. A theology for an institutionalized/bureaucratic church needs to be developed or the really radical implications of Anabaptist theology applied.

C. Emphasis must be given to the ministry of all believers and practical ways must be found to use the gifts of all persons in the work of the church.

D. Churchwide agencies should develop ways to use a broader variety of persons in their programs.

E. The spiritual maturity and wisdom of applicants for staff positions must be balanced with professional competence. After appointment staff members should maintain close relationships to a local congregation.

F. Church boards should be more representative of the "grass roots" church.

G. Church boards should develop ways to manage programs rather than merely respond to staff actions.

H. Responsible ways must be found for churchwide agencies to report to the church. Current opportunities are not adequate.

I. A forum should be established for lay persons to speak to current issues and agency programs, perhaps by enlarging the letters to the editor of the Gospel Herald.

J. More opportunities should be given for designated giving within the church structures since money is the most potent form of control.

K. The tenure of agency staff persons should be limited.

L. The size of agencies should be limited.

John W. Eby has been Secretary for Relief and Service, Mennonite Board of Missions, since 1974. Before that he taught sociology at Eastern Mennonite College. Other experience includes being administrator of the Voluntary Service program at Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities and serving as a pastor.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION: SOME QUESTIONS

by Boyd Nelson

Each of us will have our own reactions to the question of institutionalization. Here are my own reactions.

About Professionalization

John Eby talks about professionalization. The Mennonite Church has shifted in recent years to trained and supported (and therefore, professional) ministers. Educational, mission, camping, service and other institutions have grown rapidly with increasingly professional staffs. We may be tempted to assume that this is an entirely new phenomenon. I would resist that temptation.

Patterns of professionalization may have changed, but one might well define the clergy of earlier years also as a kind of professional clergy. Although they were not generally seminary-trained or supported by their congregations, once they were ordained they became members of a qualifying group--the conference leadership body. That body certified their preparation, their leadership status and helped form their "professional" attitudes.

Because the congregation chose the minister from its midst, he was not perceived as a professional, however. The conference leadership body (always ordained persons) became a reference group for ministers, much as a professional society such as the American Medical Association shapes the attitudes and functioning of its members. In some ways seminaries and church agencies carry on these functions for Mennonite ministers today and provide professional accreditation with conferences still carrying some responsibility for this function also.

To be sure, the movement in this direction for the pastorate seems to some degree to be slacking a bit. One hears of seminary faculty members (the professional accreditors) asking questions about ordination. The ferment over gifts of the Spirit in congregations is forcing a new look at how leadership gifts are discerned, developed and used. Congregations are experimenting with team ministries, breaking down some of the traditional Protestant perspectives of leadership.

A leadership development consultation of home and overseas missions planners recently emphasized charisma as a most important qualification for congregational leadership. De-emphasized were formal status, formal schooling. Emphasized was retention of congregational involvement during the time when potential leaders are working to develop their skills. Interestingly, overseas planners were clearer on this principle than home missions planners.

As far as North American congregational leadership is concerned, a principal source of the drive for a professional ministry has come from members who are themselves becoming more professional in their own occupations. They are demanding increasingly professional congregational leadership. To summarize, professionalization is involved in Mennonite Church institutionalization, it is a threat, but it is not totally new and is not universally acclaimed.

A Structural Approach to Dealing with Institutionalization

At a recent retreat, Richard Detweiler suggested a structural approach to renewal of church institutions. He seemed to say that the forces of innovation and those of order must remain in dialogue or in tension. Innovation (charismatic movement in a broad sense) must not only be tolerated but encouraged by the church. As an innovation or break-in occurs, new patterns emerge and old stultifying ones give way to make for renewal in the context of prayerful discernment. At the same time the innovative must remain in dialogue with the order structures so that an adequate discipline develops to prevent disintegration of the church. Thus a dualistic structure makes it possible for the church to deal creatively with institutionalization.

Toward a Theology for Institutions

By attempting to relate the charistmatic (innovative) and the order (structure), Detweiler has given us a helpful frame of reference. One would wish for an integrative theology on church and (or as?) institution. An adequate theology must include a God who breaks into human history in many ways. For the Mennonite Church World War II could be interpreted as one such break-in. Taking young Mennonites out of their home communities and spreading them through hundreds of different communities throughout North America in alternate service during a time of world turmoil, He unleashed a flood of forces for change in the Mennonite Church. Those changes have not all been completed yet.

In the early 1920s a small corps of dedicated and resourceful leadership remained in the Mennonite Church when many other creative persons left. From that small group have come a new and powerful conceptual framework for understanding the believers' church and effective organizational approaches which have given rise to many of the institutions we now have. Presumably God also used that traumatic and schismatic experience to focus more clearly Mennonite Church leadership and give the church direction. A theology of institution must account for events of this kind.

A theology of institution would also have to consider the role of institutions all through Holy History. That history is replete with institutions which lost their function and were replaced: the patriarchal system, the judges, the kings, the prophets, the law, the temple and the priestly system, for example. If we are to understand why, we need to define institutions as responses to needs, solutions for problems, or movements toward goals or with purposes.

In a missions seminar Everett Cattell once suggested that in the selection of the deacons in Acts 6 the Apostles were out of touch with the needs of their people. Through the people's dissatisfactions and the Apostles' limited perceptions of their apostolic role, new servants were chosen to meet those needs.

Formative leadership of the Christ movement then shifted to those new hands, and one reads little about the apostles, except in their order-maintaining roles. The new movement began to take on new and less judaistic approaches.

A theology of institution in the Christian church must also take into account the methods and perspectives of Christ. Here a quote from the Christian Leadership Letter of November, 1975, may be in order. There Ted Engstrom and Ed Dayton say:

> When we look to the New Testament for descriptions of how Christians should relate to one another (institutions by Eby's definition), we are startled by the tremendous contrast between what our experience tells us an organization should be like and the description of that ultimate organization, the Church. Instead of finding a pyramidal structure in which those further down the pyramid are subservient to those above, we are given the model of the human body (I Corinthians 12). We discover that how this body functions is determined completely by how each member functions. We are told that there are no unimportant members. In fact, our worldy concepts are completely turned upside down as we are told that the "inferior" parts of the body are worthy of more honor.

They then point out the inevitable and continuing tensions that exist for institutions and their personnel in a number of areas. An institution is formed and its personnel are hired to do a task or fulfill a function. Yet a Christian institution must also carry responsibility for being Christian in its internal and external relationships. Engstrom and Dayton call this a tension between <u>being</u> and <u>doing</u>. They note that the New Testament says very little about accomplishment and a great deal about relationships or being. They see a built-in tension between tasks and people. Neither dare be sacrificed to the other, any more than the innovative and the order-producing can be sacrificed to each other in Detweiler's approach.

An adequate theology for thinking about institution and church must also assume a capacity for change--repentance when needed, renewal on a continuing basis and stability in the face of difficulty. Repentance and renewal can only come in the context of communication with others: with the Lord, with His people and with the contextual situation. In order to foster that communication, adequate opportunities must be structured for feedback from all directions. In the previous article Eby assumes that the shaping and reshaping communication comes only through administrative lines and representative governing bodies. Institutions must have their antennae tuned to many different frequencies these days--to their constituencies, to their world, to their counterparts.* They must be responsive; although, depending on size, they may not be able to move as rapidly as some might wish. Large size may be a liability, but in some situations it may also be a strength. Size may be a stabilizing factor, even as mass may stabilize moving objects. Size may also add flexibility, although this is not generally understood.

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*Albert Meyer has a helpful rubric for viewing administration and communication in Mennonite Church structures for higher education. He talks of the principal channels of two-way communication for colleges being students and college church relations offices. They provide both feedback and interpretation. The college boards of overseers are responsible to see that this communication is happening properly and that it gives direction to the colleges. Mennonite Board of Education oversees the entire process and provides an overall structure for coordination and overseer appointment. In this approach the boards give direction but nearly all the feedback and communication which provides significant input for both administration and overseers comes through students and college relations.

Administration must provide procedures and approaches which enable adaptation. Adaptation must be given priority and receive continuing approval. Boards of directors may, of course, either inhibit or facilitate needed adaptation.

All of this roots back into Christian understandings of servanthood, which must be a significant factor in any theology of church and institution. As with the individual servant, so also with the institution as servant. The servant model is Christ Himself. The fact that there are few obvious examples of such servanthood institutions should not preclude our striving to achieve it.

This list of suggestions for a theology of church institution is not intended to be exhaustive but suggestive.

Questions of Mission Agencies

Implicit in many of the policy decisions of a mission agency are institutional questions. Granted that people working together over periods of time become institutions, when an agency assists new groups (congregations, conferences, other institutions) to emerge, what kind of institution should it be or become? Or can we decide? For the mission agency the critical question is: who is to control the shape of the new institution?

Does the agency insist on keeping control or is the outcome in the hands of the local church or community? The approach chosen will in the end determine what kind of institution emerges as well as its effectiveness. In the end those decisions must be made on the basis of what kind of church or conference or institution is ultimately desired.

A second crucial question in mission policy is why there should be an institution. Without doubt there have been many motivations for establishing institutions. From Ghana Wayne Nitsche has observed:

> Coming in contact with Baptists, Assemblies of God, Presbyterians, Wycliffe people, Catholics and others has allowed me to observe many mission programs and assess them and draw conclusions for myself . . . . I'm seeing the importance of having clear goals and priorities in a mission program. I think it's easy for mission activity to become a guilt offering, and when it comes to that it is almost worse than worthless. Can it be true that method is more important than message? I'm amazed at the theology reflected in mission and the different programs.

Some institutions may emerge in response to ego needs. In other cases, as Wayne points out, the institutional product may result from an effort to assuage guilt feelings. Luke Birky suggests that many institutions have emerged in societies to put the elderly, the longterm ill, the mentally ill, the retarded or the deviant out of sight and out of mind. Ego needs may be not only individual but collective--not only of individual persons but of communities or societies. We must always ask, "why?"

A third questions for the mission agency will be, "how?" How can we structure our relationships with the emerging institutional structure consistent with the end goal? Without the application of this question on a continuing basis, relationships will change, decisions will be made and directions taken which may well defeat the original purpose or goal.

If the ultimate goal is a mature, self-directing, self-sustaining and indigenous institution, too many outside personnel and too much outside money may reduce the institution (or church) to dependency. Unclear or undisciplined personnel may frustrate purpose. If strong, self-directing, self-sustaining institutions are the goal, local persons will be involved early in planning, decision-making, goal-setting and all other phases of the operation. Indeed the original initiative for the formation of that institution might well come from local persons. Local initiatives will help to determine the kind and extent of needs and the proposed response or solution needed. Outside personnel must be oriented and must discipline themselves to methods directed toward the goals in hand.

Rational and Nonrational Factors in Institutionalization

Eby notes that institutions operate on rational bases. If that were true, there might be fewer problems. Problems arise from the fact that nonrational factors become operative in individual and corporate processes without those involved being aware of them. This may be one reason institutions have been considered helpful. As people are teamed together, the rationale for any decision or operation has at least some occasion for review. When the "in-group" is small, cohesive and out-of-touch with the larger supporting society or the potential customers, or when institutional operation becomes too ponderous and unresponsive, the institution easily incurs difficulty.

The church may in many ways be more prone to this kind of problem because most of its attention and efforts are directed toward intangible and unmeasurable values and outcomes. Pious fog often replaces careful thinking, hiding from even the immediate participants important considerations. Church people often come to believe that the work of the kingdom goes on without or in spite of them because "it is God's work." This can become a serious and handicapping copout. While the work must be rooted in or directed back to God, He generally works through human instrumentation. A human instrumentality using all its powers under God's direction should presumably be more helpful than one which operates blindly and unthinkingly.

The challenge to the church institution (congregation, conference, or other institution) lies in melding both rational and nonrational elements together in realistic ways. Without the nonrational elements much of the motivation for any effort dissipates. The springs for human action often lie in the nonrational area. The most rational approach must take into account those nonrational elements and include them in planning, decision-making and implementation.

Because of feelings like these and the difficulties inherent in changing institutions, many people have suggested that institutions be eliminated. They throw up their hands as if the situation were hopeless. This is hardly a possibility. Some institutions may be, and perhaps ought to be, eliminated. Institutions are a must, however, as long as people choose to live and work together. The challenge, then, is how to work at changing the institution, renewing it, or phasing it out at the proper time.

Summary

In this response to John Eby's paper I have tried to show how professionalization as one aspect of institutionalization has occurred in the past. We have looked at Richard Detweiler's suggestion that keeping innovation and order in tension through dialogue as a way to keep church institutions sensitive. Some elements of a potential integrative theology on church and/as institution

have been suggested. Using the kinds of questions mission agencies face, I have tried to suggest that we can shape and form institutions although we probably can never control them down to the last detail. The issue can never be whether the church can have institutions or not. The basic questions must always be: "Why (with an "if" implied)?" "How to begin?" "How to direct?" Throughout I have tried indirectly to suggest that the church's institutional situation is not hopeless and that there are many ways of working with institutions to make them responsive, useful and effective in extending Christ's kingdom although we have talked of only a few of them.

Boyd Nelson joined the Mennonite Board of Missions staff in 1952. Since 1959 he has been Secretary for Information Services.

Editorial Comment

The Mission-Focus editorial committee has projected plans for Volume 5. We expect to publish two articles each issue. This will allow more topics to be treated than was possible with the past pattern.

Each of the five issues beginning with September 1976 will feature an article on the theme, "Where are we in missions today?" The series will begin with an overview and then turn to home missions, mass communications, overseas missions and service missions. The aim will be to analyze where the mission of the church has come from during the past decade and the emergent directions and issues ahead.

The other sequence of articles will treat complimentary topics: the gospel and culture in evangelism, church growth among Spanish-speaking North Americans, conversion, the Bible and mission and the gospel of peace.

The circle of Mission-Focus readers continues to grow. This encourages the editorial committee to believe that the commitment to Christian mission is strong even though there are many questions begging to be discussed. Indeed, this combination of commitment and questioning is a dynamic relationship which augurs for increased vitality as we seek for fresh insight from the Word and through the Spirit's illumination.

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